

NEIL GAIMAN'S

ONLY THE END of the WORLD AGAIN



P. CRAIG RUSSELL • TROY NIXEY • MATTHEW HOLLINGSWORTH

081

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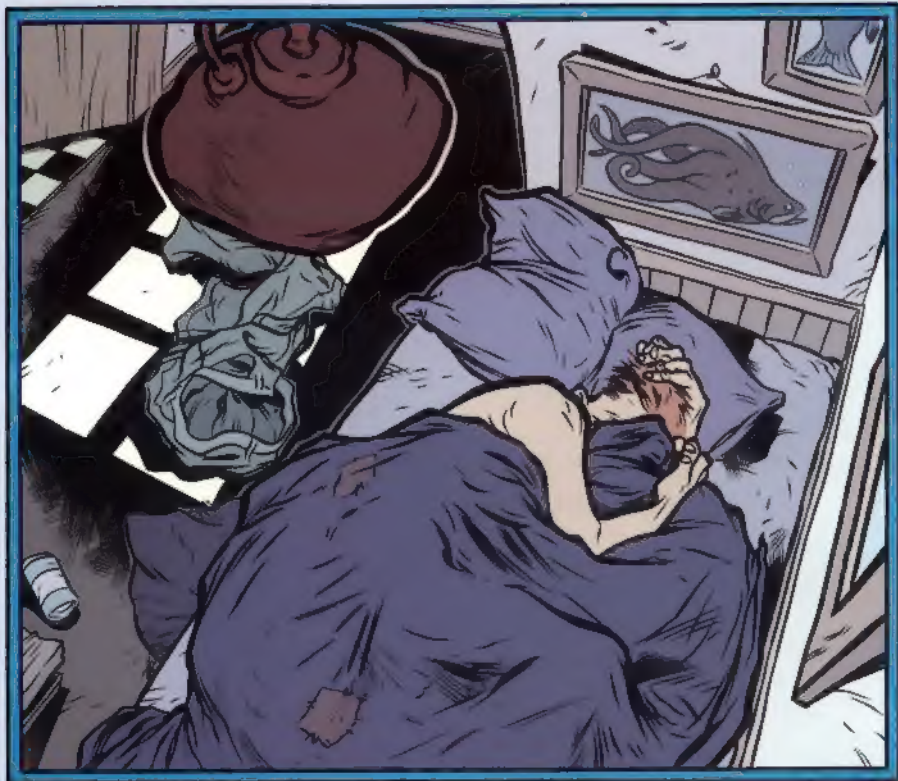


It was a bad day.

I woke up naked in the bed, with a cramp in my stomach, feeling more or less like hell. Something about the quality of the light, stretched and metallic, like the colour of a migraine, told me it was afternoon.

The room was freezing... literally; there was a thin crust of ice on the inside of the windows. The sheets on the bed around me were ripped and clawed, and there was animal hair in the bed.

It itched.



ONLY THE END of the WORLD AGAIN™

CREATED AND WRITTEN BY NEIL GAIMAN

ADAPTATION BY P. CRAIG RUSSELL

ARTWORK BY TROY NIXEY

COLORS BY MATTHEW HOLLINGSWORTH

LETTERING BY SEAN KONOT



I was thinking about staying in bed for the next week-- I'm always tired after a change--

--but a wave of nausea forced me to disentangle myself from the bedding.



My head felt swimmy.

The cramps hit me again as I got to the bathroom door.

I crumpled to the floor, and before I could manage to raise my head enough to find the toilet bowl...



...I began to spew.



I vomited a foul-smelling, thin, yellow liquid; in it was a dog's paw-- my guess was a Doberman's, but I'm not really a dog person--



--a tomato peel; some diced carrots and sweet corn...



...some lumps of half-chewed meat, raw...



...and some fingers.

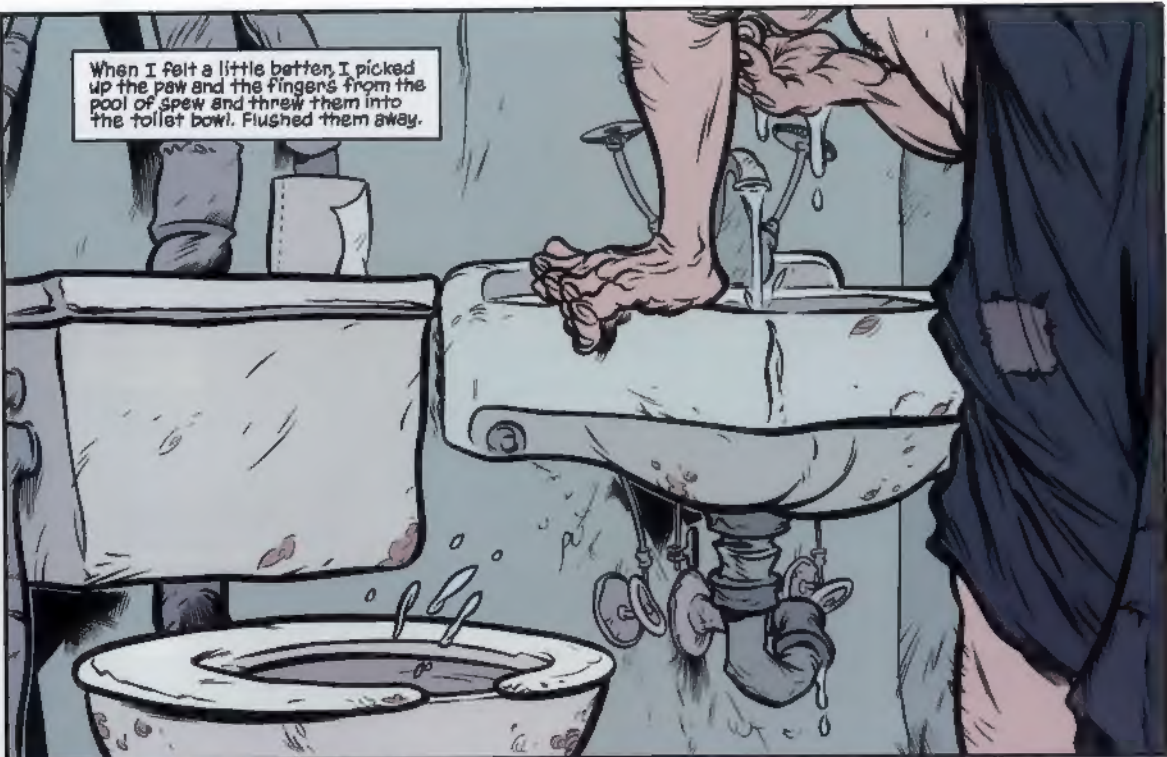


They were fairly small, pale fingers, obviously a child's.



SHIT.

When I felt a little better, I picked up the paw and the fingers from the pool of spew and threw them into the toilet bowl. Flushed them away.



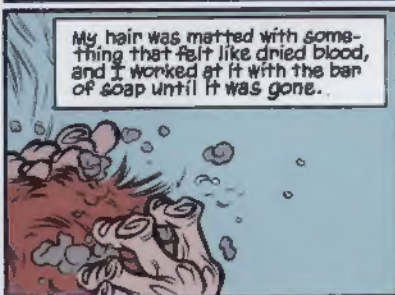
Then I turned on the shower and stood in the bathtub like a zombie as the hot water sluiced over me. I soaped myself down, body and hair.



The meagre lather turned grey; I must have been filthy.



My hair was matted with something that felt like dried blood, and I worked at it with the bar of soap until it was gone.



Then I stood under the shower until the water turned icy.





There was a note under the door...

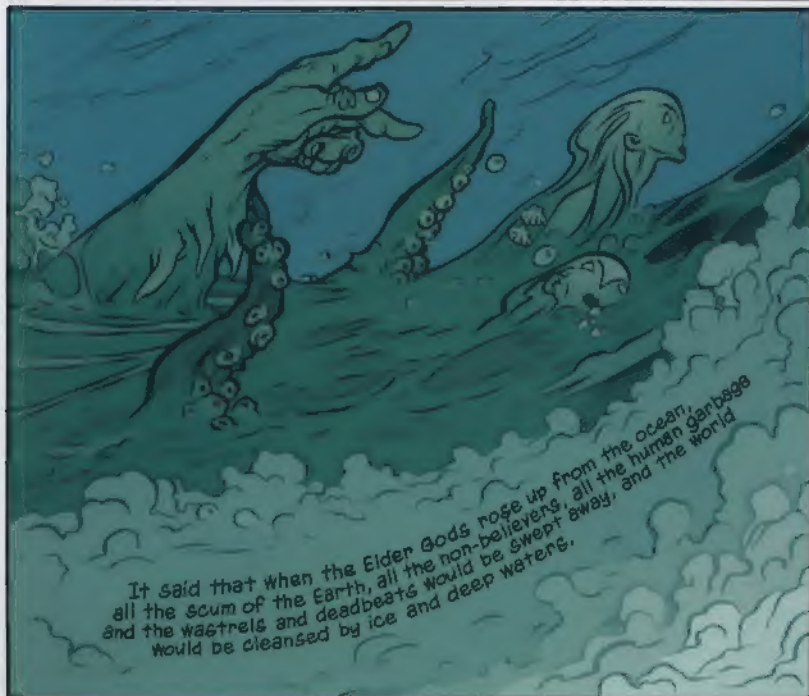
...from my landlady.

It said that I owed her for two weeks' rent.



It said that all the answers were in the Book of Revelations.

It said that I made a lot of noise coming home in the early hours of the morning, and she'd thank me to be quieter in the future.

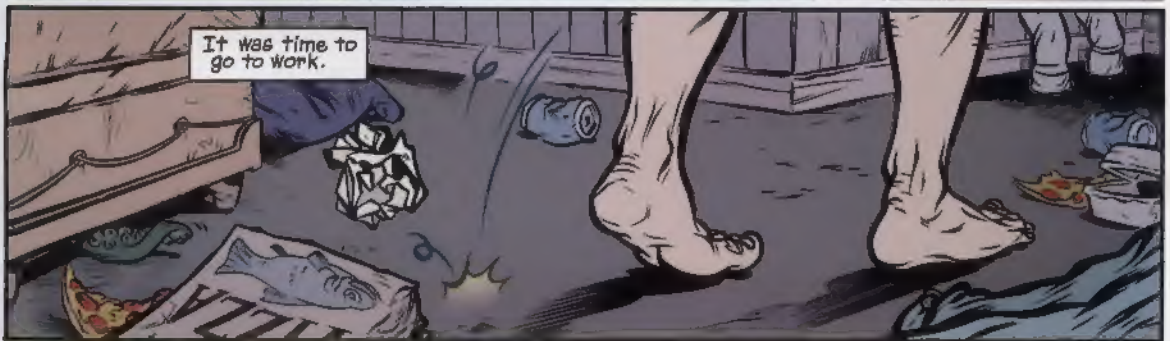


It said that when the Elder Gods rose up from the ocean, all the scum of the Earth, all the non-believers, all the human garbage and the wastrels and deadbeats would be swept away, and the world would be cleansed by ice and deep waters.



Sin-
the two weeks you're due on
that card I must address
that your nocturnal
as of duty to of grow
am, and I shall hope
trick to those of us
fully sleep during the
hope you should read
Revelations this all
for Gods and
came to the
apart to the
fragrant with
the
people
the
sided of
fusing
etc.

It was time to go to work.





My landlady was
nowhere to be seen.



She was a
short, pop-eyed
woman, who
spoke little...

... although she left
extensive notes for me
pinned to doors and
placed where I might
see them.



She kept the
house filled
with the smell
of boiling
seafood...



... huge pots were
always simmering
on the kitchen stove...



... Filled with things
with too many legs...



... and other
things...



... with no legs at all.



There were other rooms
in the house, but no one
else rented them.

No one in
their right
mind would
come to
Innsmouth
in winter.



Outside the house,
it didn't smell much
better.

I'd been in Innsmouth two weeks, and I disliked it. It smelled fishy. It was a claustrophobic little town: marshland to the east, cliffs to the west, and in the centre, a harbour that held a few rotting fishing boats and was not even scenic at sunset.



The yuppies had come to Innsmouth in the Eighties anyway, bought their picturesque fisherman's cottages overlooking the harbour.



The yuppies had been gone for some years now, and the cottages by the bay were crumbling, abandoned.

The inhabitants of Innsmouth lived here and there in and around the town, and in the trailer parks that ringed it, filled with dank mobile homes that were never going anywhere.



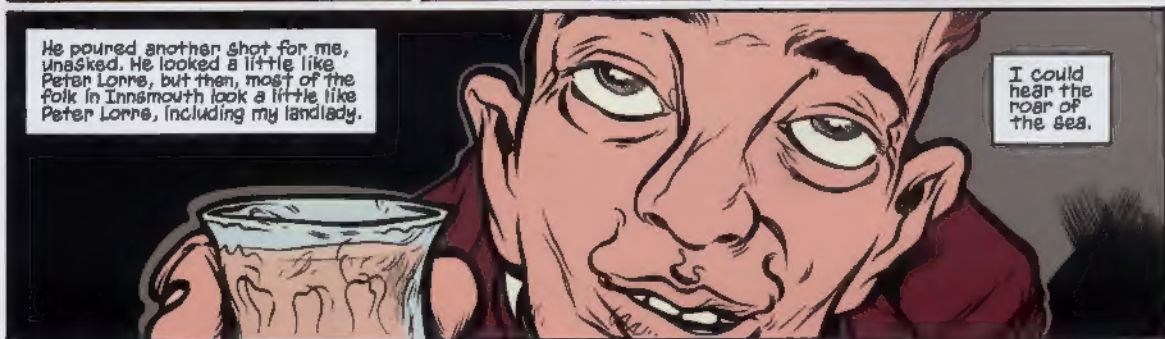
A cold, salty wind came up off the bay. The gulls were screaming miserably. I felt shirty. My office would be freezing, too.



I really needed a drink.



Work could wait.





I sank the Jack Daniels, this time felt it burning down into my stomach, the way it should.

IT'S WHAT THEY SAY. I NEVER SAID I BELIEVED IT.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

BURN THE GIRDLE.



PARDON?



THE LYKANTHROPOI HAVE GIRDLES OF HUMAN SKIN GIVEN TO THEM AT THEIR FIRST TRANSFORMATION BY THEIR MASTERS IN HELL.

BURN THE GIRDLE.



IF YOU DRINK RAIN-WATER OUT OF A WARG-WOLF'S PAW PRINT, THAT'LL MAKE A WOLF OF YOU WHEN THE MOON IS FULL.



THE ONLY CURE IS TO HUNT DOWN THE WOLF THAT MADE THE PRINT IN THE FIRST PLACE AND CUT OFF ITS HEAD WITH A KNIFE FORGED OF VIRGIN SILVER.



VIRGIN, HUH?



His chess partner, bald and wrinkled, shook his head and croaked a single sad sound.

THAAH...

Then he moved his queen and croaked again.

I paid for the drinks and left a dollar tip on the bar. The barman was reading his book once more and ignored it.



Outside the bar, big wet kissy flakes of snow had begun to fall, settling in my hair and eyelashes.

I HATE SNOW.

I HATE NEW ENGLAND.

I HATE INNSMOUTH...

"IT'S NO PLACE TO BE ALONE..."

... but if there's a good place to be alone, I've not found it yet.

Still, business has kept me on the move for more moons than I like to think about.

Business...

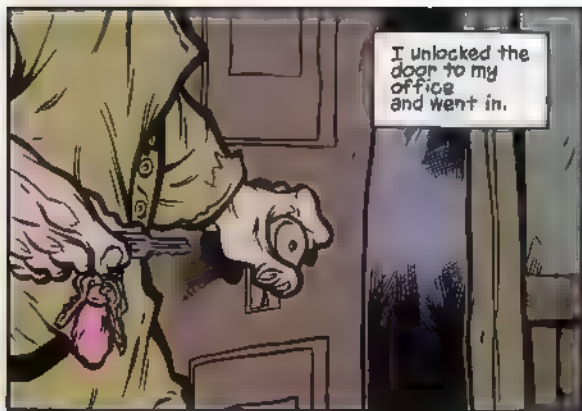
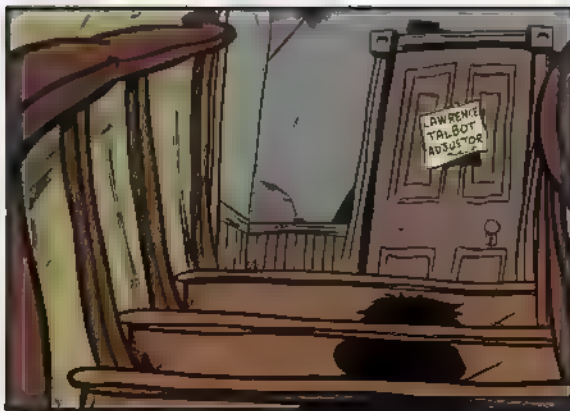
... and other things.

JUST DIE

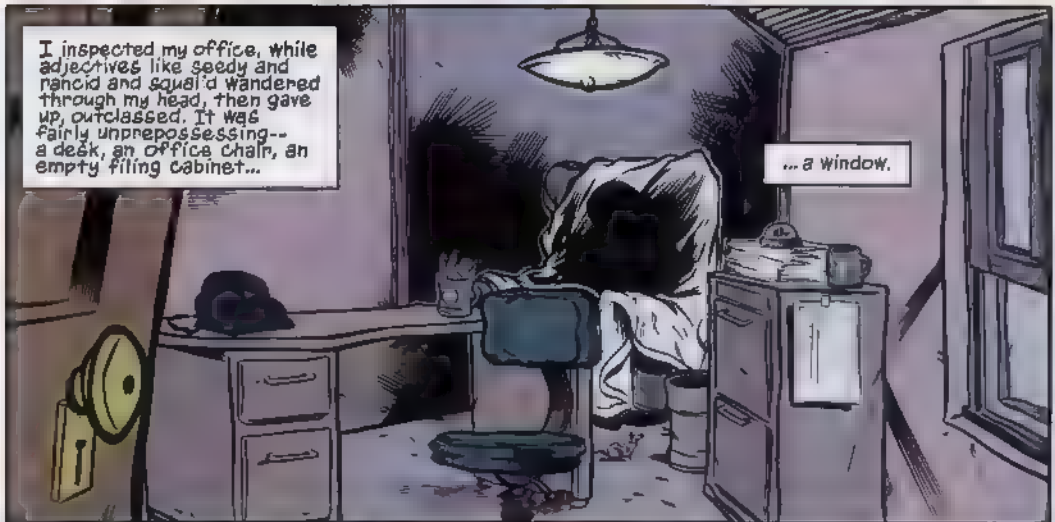
JUST DIE

RIGHT, LIKE IT'S EASY.

JUST DIE



I unlocked the door to my office and went in.



I inspected my office, while adjectives like seedy and rancid and squid wandered through my head, then gave up, outclassed. It was fairly unprepossessing-- a desk, an office chair, an empty filing cabinet...

... a window.



There was a liquor store, and a palmist was operating on the second floor.



The smell of old cooking grease permeated from the boarded-up fried chicken joint below.



I imagined a multitude of black cockroaches swarming over every surface in the darkness beneath me.

THAT'S THE
SHAPE OF THE
WORLD THAT YOU'RE
THINKING
OF THERE.

It was said with a deep, dark voice, deep enough that I felt it in the pit of my stomach.



WE LOOK ABOUT IN PUZZLEMENT AT OUR WORLD, WITH A SENSE OF UNEASE AND DISQUIET.



WE THINK OF OURSELVES AS SCHOLARS IN ARCAINE LITURGIES, SINGLE MEN TRAPPED IN WORLDS BEYOND OUR DEVISING.



THE TRUTH IS FAR SIMPLER: THERE ARE THINGS IN THE DARKNESS BENEATH US THAT WISH US HARM.

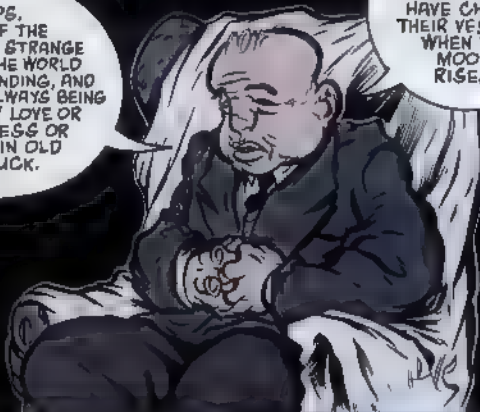


YOU READ MY MIND?



The man in the armchair took a slow deep breath that rattled in the back of his throat.

PERHAPS, THE END OF THE WORLD IS A STRANGE CONCEPT. THE WORLD IS ALWAYS ENDING, AND THE END IS ALWAYS BEING AVERTED, BY LOVE OR FOOLISHNESS OR JUST PLAIN OLD DUMB LUCK.



AH, WELL. IT'S TOO LATE NOW: THE ELDER GODS HAVE CHOSEN THEIR VESSELS. WHEN THE MOON RISES...

A thin trickle of drool came from one corner of his mouth...

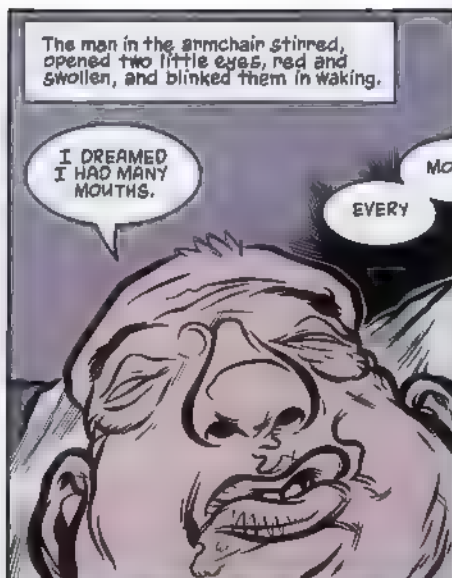
...trickled down in a thread of silver to his collar.

Something scuttled down into the shadows of his coat.



YEAH? WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE MOON RISES?





The man in the armchair stirred, opened two little eyes, red and swollen, and blinked them in waking.

I DREAMED I HAD MANY MOUTHS.

EVERY

MOUTH

WAS

OPENING

AND

CLOSING

INDEPENDENTLY.

SOME

SOME

MOUTHS

TALKING,

WHISPERING,

WERE

SOME

EATING.

SOME WAITING IN SILENCE.

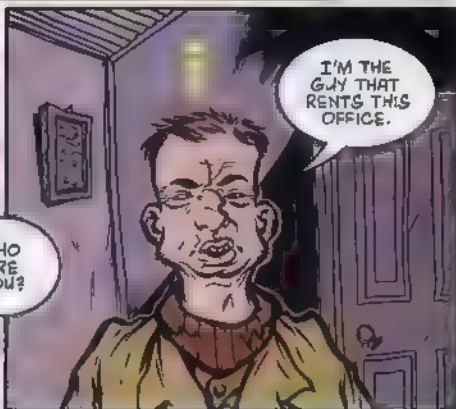


He looked around...

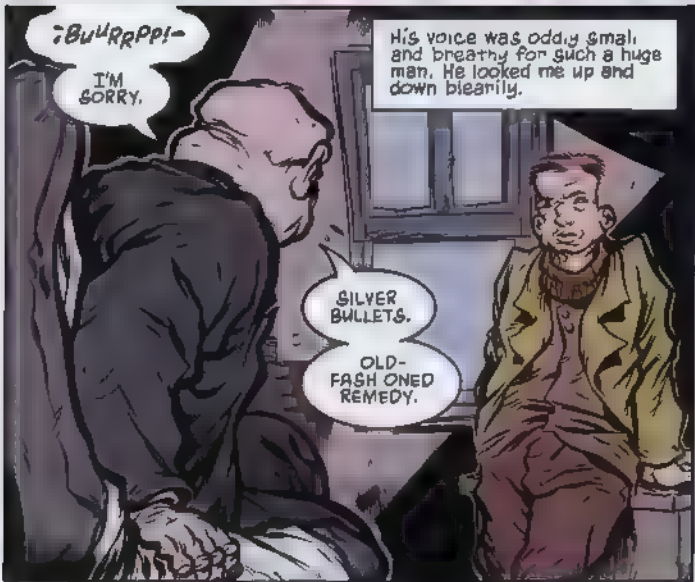
...sat back in the chair, blinking puzzledly.

...wiped the spittle from the corner of his mouth...

WHO ARE YOU?



I'M THE GUY THAT RENTS THIS OFFICE.



BUURPPP!

I'M SORRY.

His voice was oddly small and breathy for such a huge man. He looked me up and down blearily.

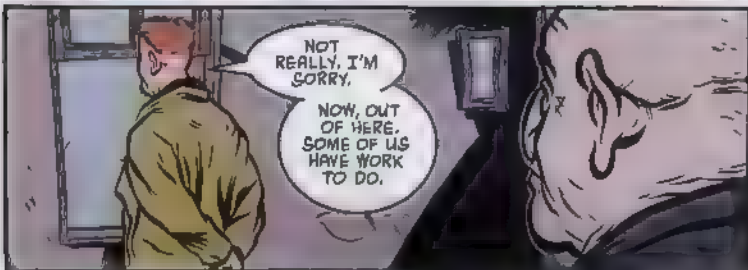
SILVER BULLETS.

OLD-FASH ONED REMEDY.



YEAH. THAT'S SO OBVIOUS-- MUST BE WHY I DIDN'T THINK OF IT. GEE, I COULD JUST KICK MYSELF. I REALLY COULD.

YOU'RE MAKING FUN OF AN OLD MAN.



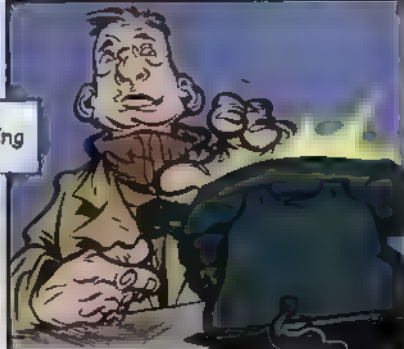
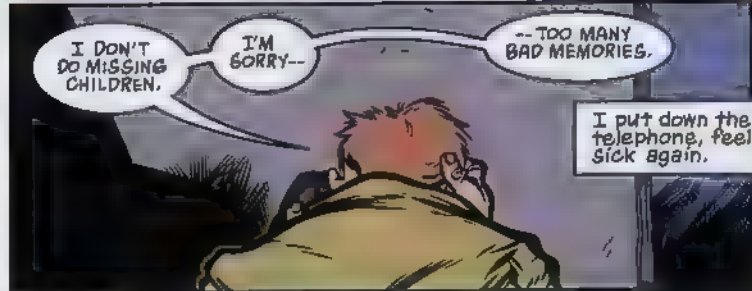
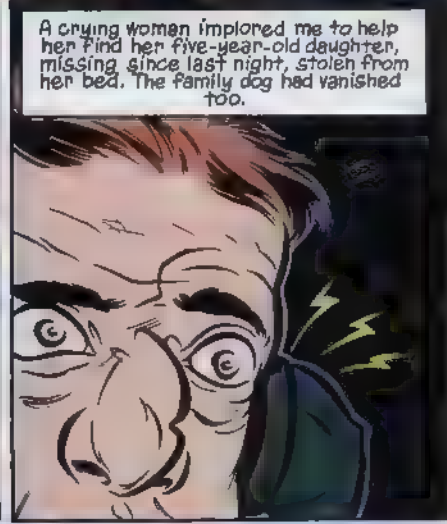
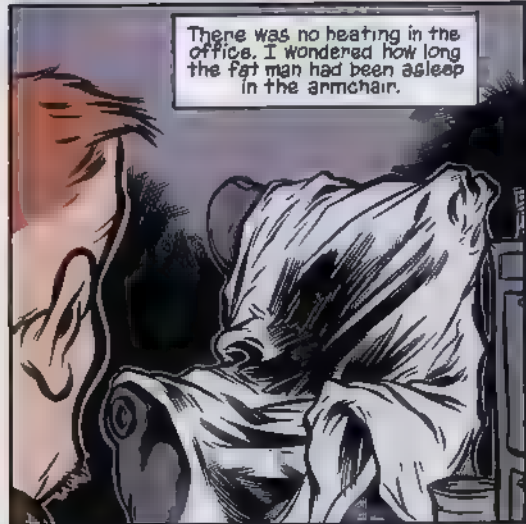
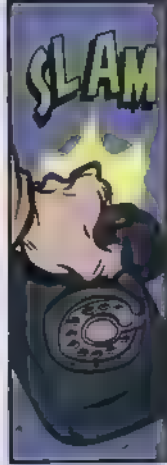
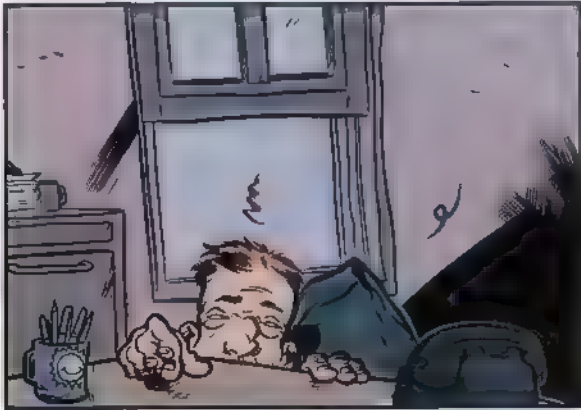
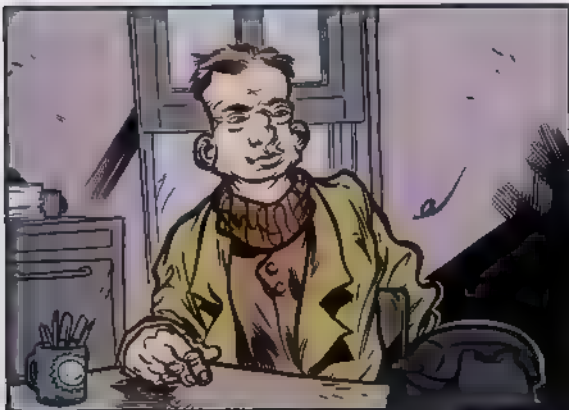
NOT REALLY, I'M SORRY.

NOW, OUT OF HERE. SOME OF US HAVE WORK TO DO.



He shambled out.

I sat down in the swivel chair at the desk by the window and discovered, after some minutes, through trial and error, that if I swiveled the chair to the left it fell off its base.





It was getting dark now...

...and, for the first time since I had been in Innsmouth, the neon sign across the street flicked on.



Armageddon is averted by small actions.



That's the way it was. That's the way it always has to be.



It was the aluminum-siding man again.

YOU KNOW, TRANSFORMATION FROM MAN TO ANIMAL AND BACK BEING, BY DEFINITION, IMPOSSIBLE, WE NEED TO LOOK FOR OTHER SOLUTIONS.



DEPERSONALIZATION, OBVIOUSLY, AND LIKEWISE SOME FORM OF PROJECTION.

BRAIN DAMAGE? PERHAPS.

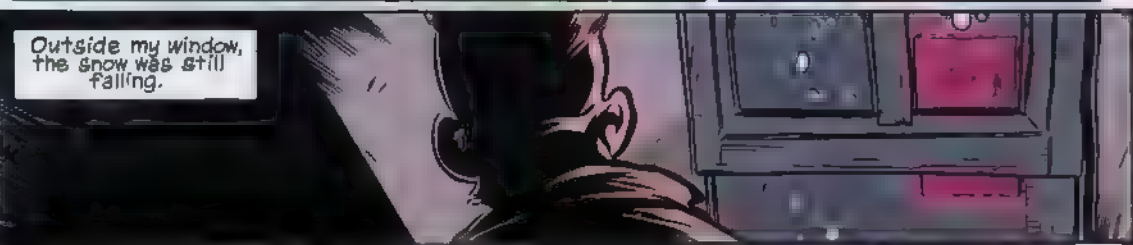
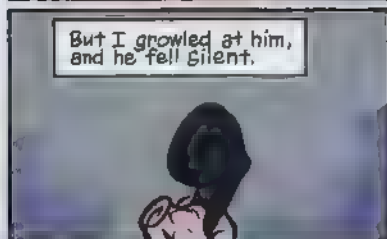
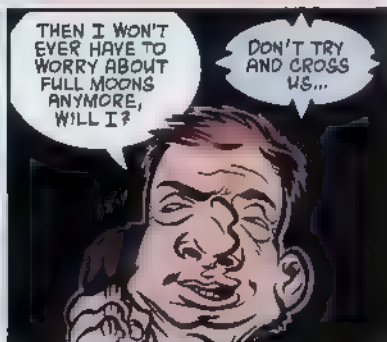
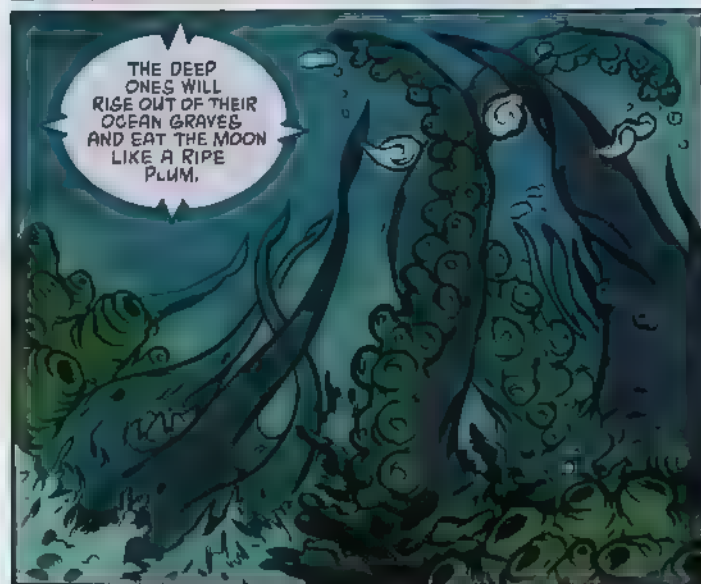
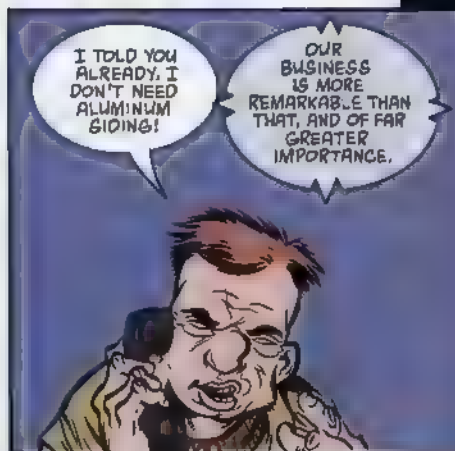
PSYCHO-NEUROTIC SCHIZOPHRENIA? LAUGHABLY SO.

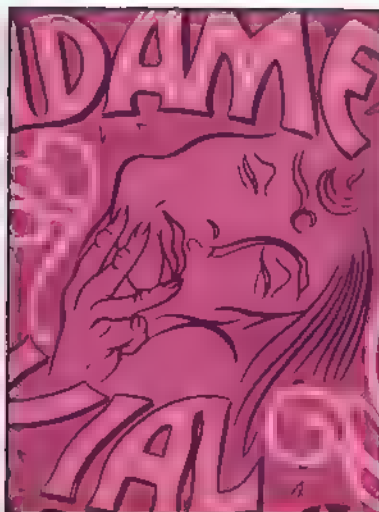
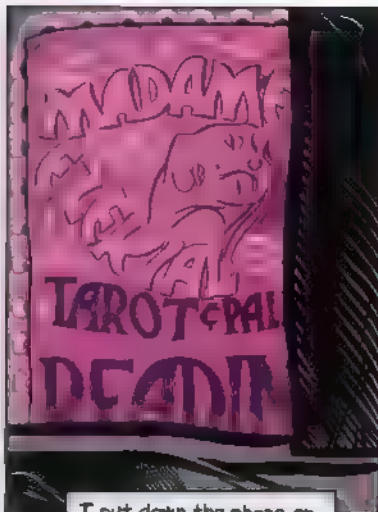
SOME CASES HAVE BEEN TREATED WITH INTRAVENOUS THIORIDAZINE HYDROCHLORIDE.

SUCCESSFULLY?

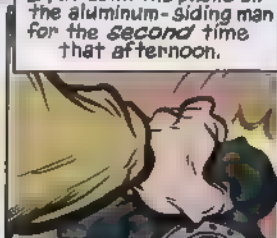
Heh-heh. THAT'S WHAT I LIKE. A MAN WITH A SENSE OF HUMOR. I'M SURE WE CAN DO BUSINESS.







I put down the phone on the aluminum-siding man for the *second* time that afternoon.



She smiled at me as I walked in, beckoned me over to her seat by the window. The room *stank* of incense and patchouli oil. She was playing a card game with a tarot deck, some version of solitaire.



As I reached her, one elegant hand swept up the cards, wrapped them in a silk scarf—



-- placed them gently in a wooden box

The scents of the room made my head pound. I hadn't eaten anything today, I realized; perhaps that was what was making me lightheaded.



I sat down, across the table from her, in the candlelight. She extended her hand, and took my hand in hers.

HAIR?

YEAH, WELL, I'M ON MY OWN A LOT.

I grinned.

I hoped it was a friendly grin.

WHEN I LOOK AT YOU, THIS IS WHAT I SEE.

I SEE THE EYE OF A MAN.

ALSO, I SEE THE EYE OF A WOLF.

IN THE EYE OF A MAN, I SEE HONESTY, DEGENCY, INNOCENCE.

I SEE AN UPRIGHT MAN WHO WALKS ON A SQUARE.

"AND IN THE EYE OF A WOLF, I SEE A GROANING AND A GROWLING, NIGHT HOWLS AND CRIES. I SEE A MONSTER RUNNING WITH BLOOD-FLECKED SPITTLE IN THE DARKNESS OF THE BORDERS OF THE TOWN."

HOW CAN YOU SEE A GROWL OR A CRY?

Her accent was not American. It was Russ an, or Maltese, or Egyptian, perhaps.

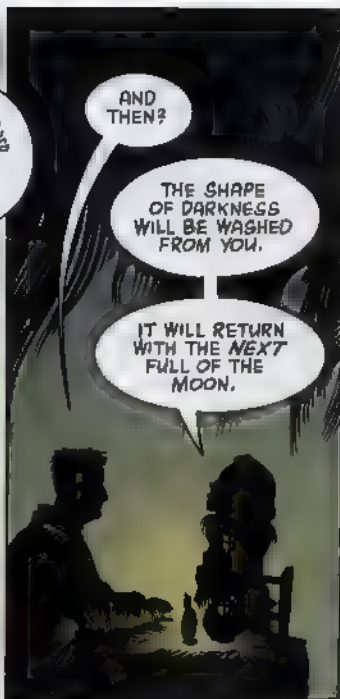
IT IS NOT HARD. IN THE EYE OF THE MIND, WE SEE MANY THINGS.



Madame Ezekiel closed her green eyes.

THERE IS A TRADITIONAL WAY. A WAY TO WASH OFF A BAD SHAPE.

YOU STAND IN RUNNING WATER, IN CLEAR SPRING WATER, WHILE EATING WHITE ROSE PETALS.



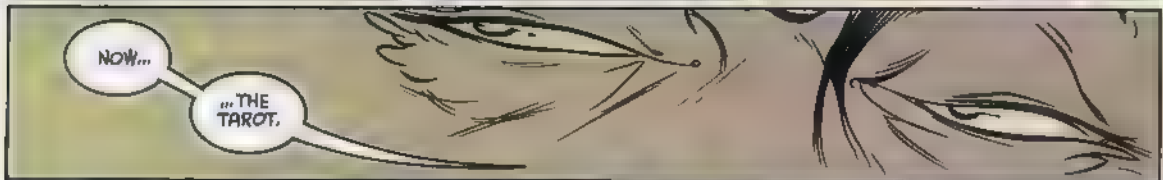
AND THEN?

THE SHAPE OF DARKNESS WILL BE WASHED FROM YOU.

IT WILL RETURN WITH THE NEXT FULL OF THE MOON.



SO, ONCE THE SHAPE IS WASHED FROM YOU, YOU OPEN YOUR VEINS IN THE RUNNING WATER. IT WILL STING MIGHTILY, OF COURSE, BUT THE RIVER WILL CARRY THE BLOOD AWAY.



NOW...

...THE TAROT.

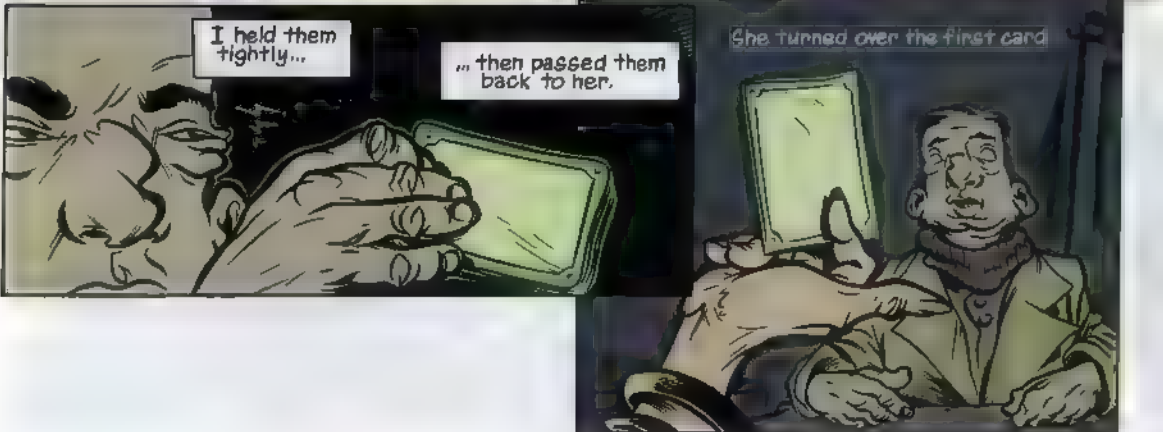


She unwrapped her deck from the black silk scarf that held it, passed me the cards to shuffle. I fanned them, riffled and bridged.

SLOWER, SLOWER.

... LIKE A WOMAN WOULD LOVE YOU.

LET THEM GET TO KNOW YOU. LET THEM LOVE YOU, LIKE...



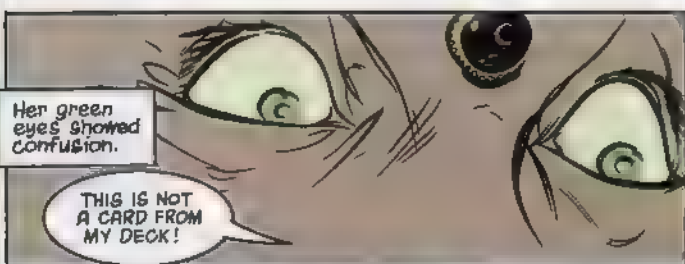
I held them tightly...

... then passed them back to her.

She turned over the first card



It was called *The Warwolf*.



Her green eyes showed confusion.

THIS IS NOT A CARD FROM MY DECK!



She turned over the next card.

WHAT DID YOU DO TO MY CARDS?

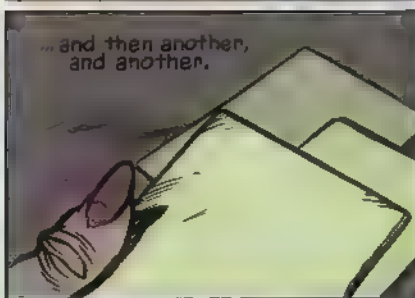
NOTHING, M'AM.

I JUST HELD THEM. THAT'S ALL.

The card she had turned over was The Deep One. It showed something green and faintly octopoid. The thing's mouths-- if they were indeed mouths and not tentacles-- began to writhe on the card as I watched.

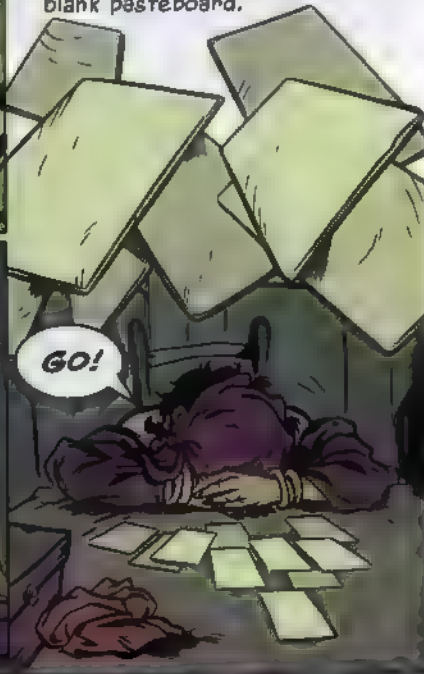


She covered it with another card...



...and then another, and another.

The rest of the cards were blank pasteboard.



DID YOU DO THAT?

She sounded on the verge of tears.

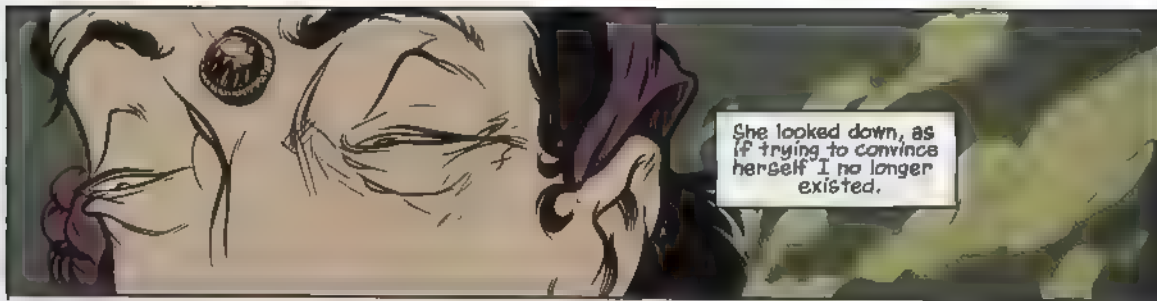


NO.

GO NOW.

BUT...

GO!

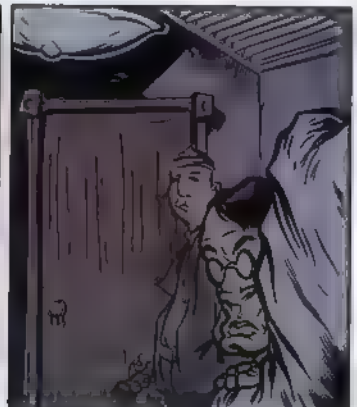


She looked down, as if trying to convince herself I no longer existed.

I stood up, in the room that smelled of incense and candle-wax. Across the street, a light flashed briefly in my office window.

Two men with flashlights were inside. They were opening the empty filing cabinet and peering around.

Then they took up their positions-- one in the armchair, the other behind the door-- waiting for me to return.



I smiled to myself.



It was cold and inhospitable in my office.



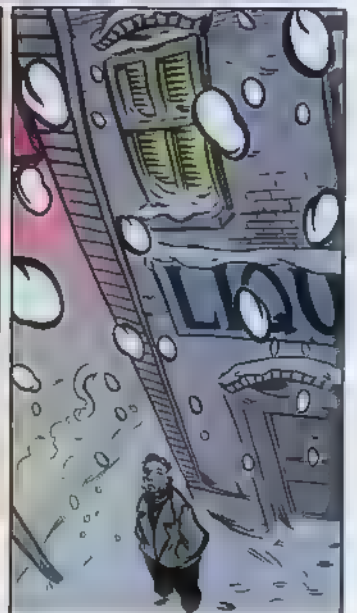
With any luck, they would wait there for hours before they finally decided...

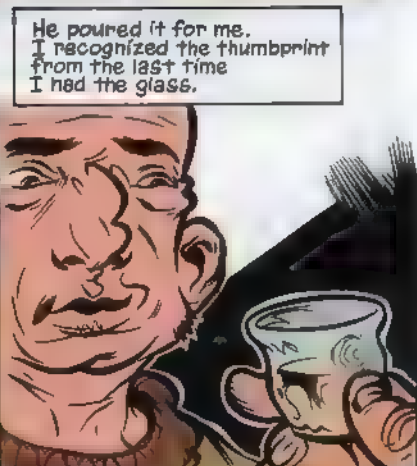
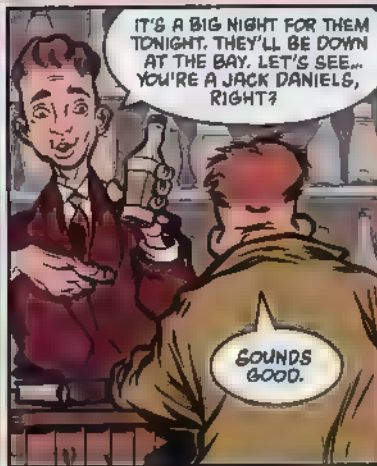


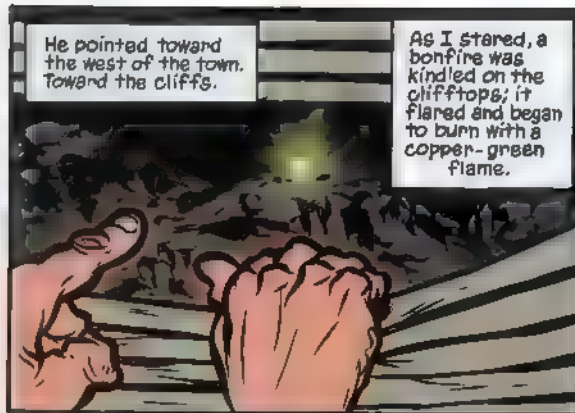
...I wasn't coming back



So, I left Madame Ezekiel turning over her cards, one by one, staring at them as if *that* would make the pictures return.





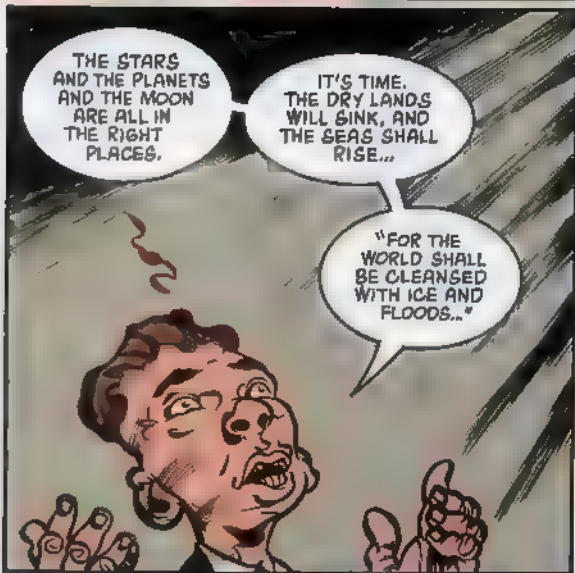


He pointed toward the west of the town. Toward the cliffs.

As I stared, a bonfire was kindled on the clifftops; it flared and began to burn with a copper-green flame.



THEY'RE GOING TO WAKE THE DEEP ONES.



THE STARS AND THE PLANETS AND THE MOON ARE ALL IN THE RIGHT PLACES.

IT'S TIME. THE DRY LANDS WILL SINK, AND THE SEAS SHALL RISE...

"FOR THE WORLD SHALL BE CLEANSSED WITH ICE AND FLOODS..."



"...AND I'LL THANK YOU TO KEEP TO YOUR OWN SHELF IN THE REFRIGERATOR."



PARDON?

NOTHING.



WHAT'S THE QUICKEST WAY TO GET UP TO THOSE CLIFFS?

BACK UP MARCH STREET, HANG A LEFT AT THE CHURCH OF DRAGON, 'TILL YOU REACH MANUXT WAY AND THEN JUST KEEP ON GOING.



C'MON. I'LL WALK YOU UP THERE. I'D HATE TO MISS ANY OF THE FUN.

YOU SURE?

NO ONE IN TOWN'S GOING TO BE DRINKING TONIGHT.



It was chilly in the street,
and fallen snow blew about
the ground, like white mists.

From street level I
could no longer tell if
Madame Ezekiel was
in her den above her
neon sign...

... or if my guests
were still waiting
for me in my
office.

We put our heads down
against the wind, and we
walked.

Over the noise of the wind, I heard the barman talking...

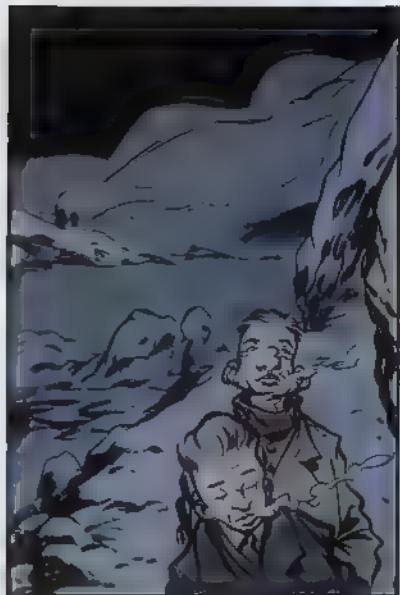
"WINNOW WITH
GIANT ARMS THE
SLUMBERING GREEN, THERE
HATH HE LAID FOR AGES AND
WILL LIE BATTENING UPON HUGE
SEAWORMS IN HIS SLEEP, UNTIL
THE LATTER FIRE SHALL HEAT THE
DEEP; THEN ONCE BY MEN
AND ANGELS TO BE SEEN,
IN ROARING HE,
SHALL RISE..."

?

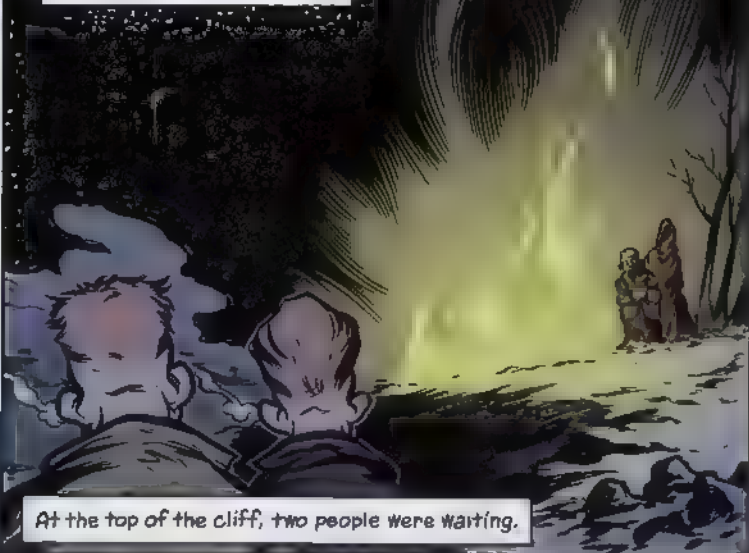
"...AND ON
THE
SURFACE
DIE."

Twenty minutes' walking and we were out of Innsmouth.

The Manuxet Way stopped when we left the town, and it became a narrow dirt path, partly covered with snow and ice, and we slipped and slid our way up it in the darkness.

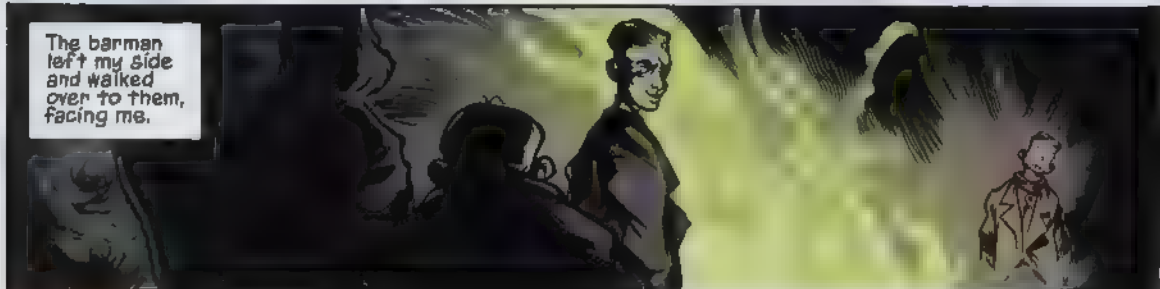


The moon was not yet up, but the stars had already begun to come out. There were so many of them. They were sprinkled like diamond dust and crushed sapphires across the night sky.



At the top of the cliff, two people were waiting.

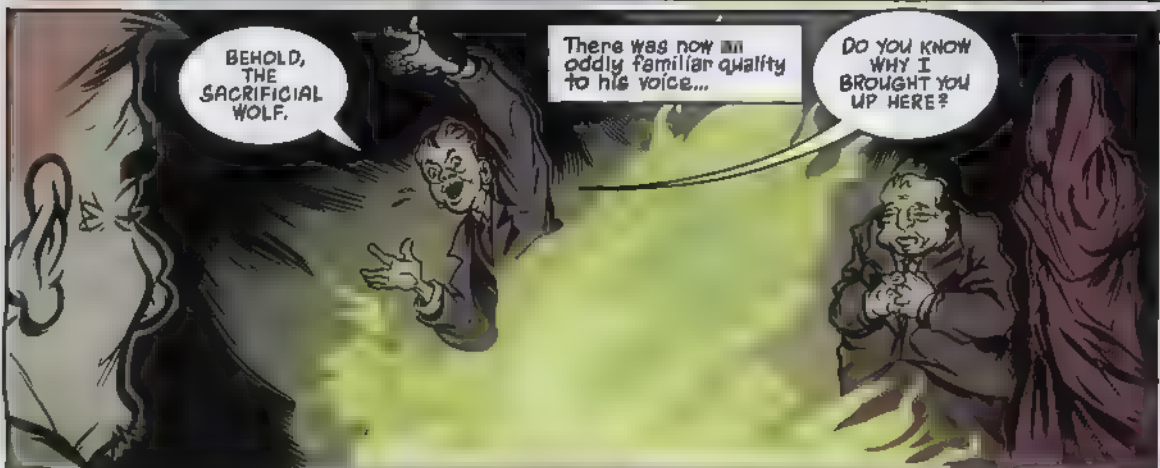
The barman left my side and walked over to them, facing me.



BEHOLD, THE SACRIFICIAL WOLF.

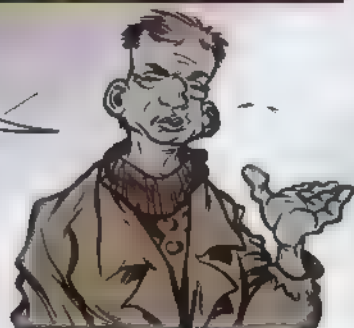
There was now an oddly familiar quality to his voice...

DO YOU KNOW WHY I BROUGHT YOU UP HERE?



And I knew then why his voice was familiar: it was the voice of the man who had attempted to sell me aluminum siding.

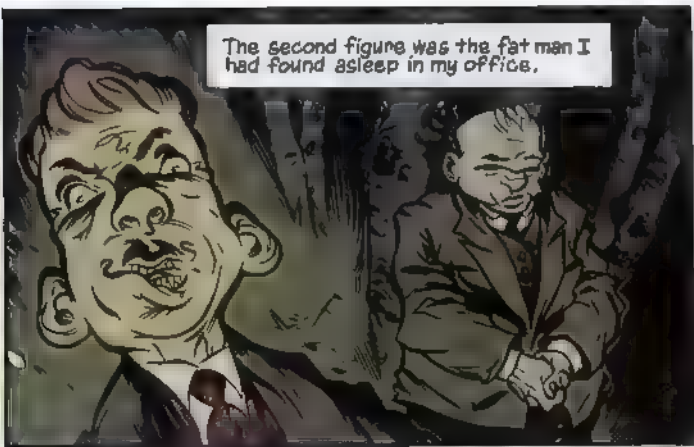
TO STOP THE WORLD ENDING?



He laughed at me, then.



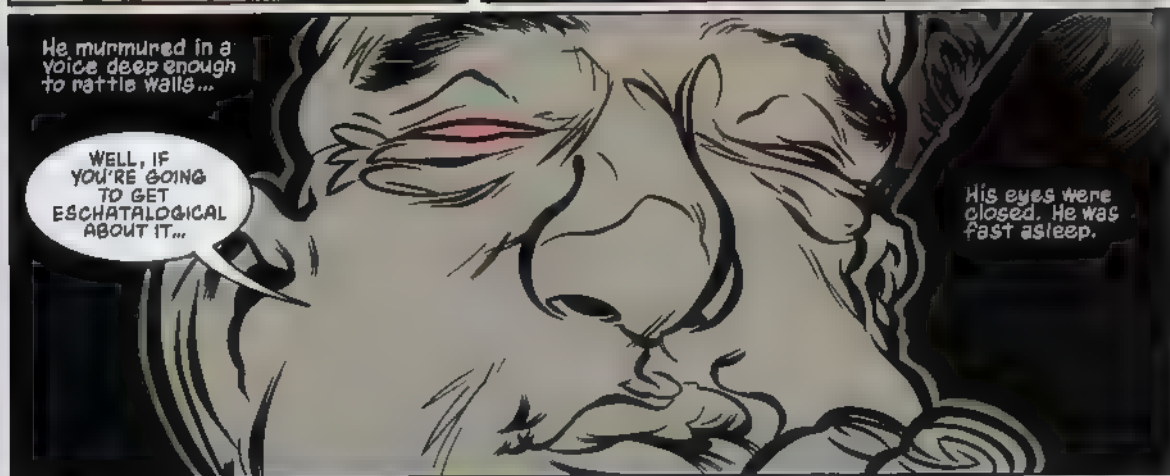
The second figure was the fat man I had found asleep in my office,



He murmured in a voice deep enough to rattle walls...

WELL, IF YOU'RE GOING TO GET ESCHATALOGICAL ABOUT IT...

His eyes were closed. He was fast asleep.



The third figure was shrouded in dark silks and smelled of patchouli oil.



It held a knife.



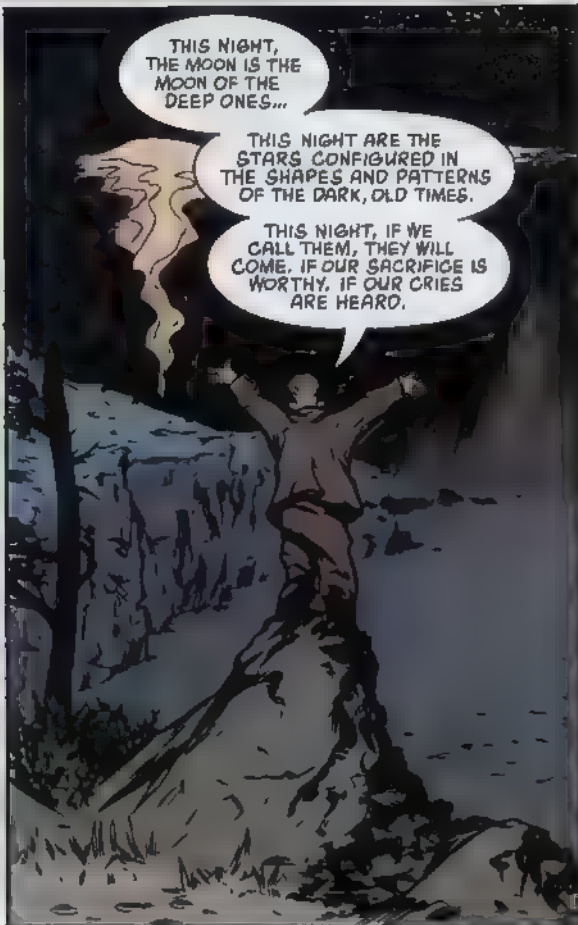
It said nothing.



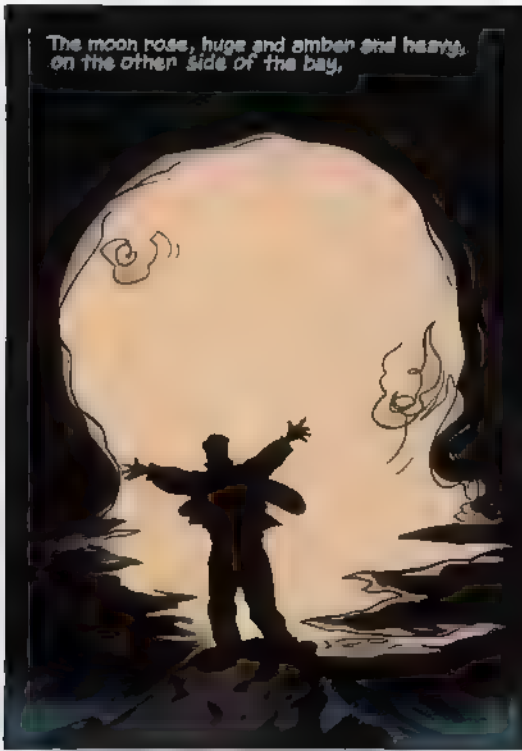
THIS NIGHT, THE MOON IS THE MOON OF THE DEEP ONES...

THIS NIGHT ARE THE STARS CONFIGURED IN THE SHAPES AND PATTERNS OF THE DARK, OLD TIMES.

THIS NIGHT, IF WE CALL THEM, THEY WILL COME. IF OUR SACRIFICE IS WORTHY. IF OUR CRIES ARE HEARD.



The moon rose, huge and amber and heavy,
on the other side of the bay,



And a chorus of low
croaking rose with it
from the ocean far
beneath us.



Moonlight on snow
and ice is not day-
light...

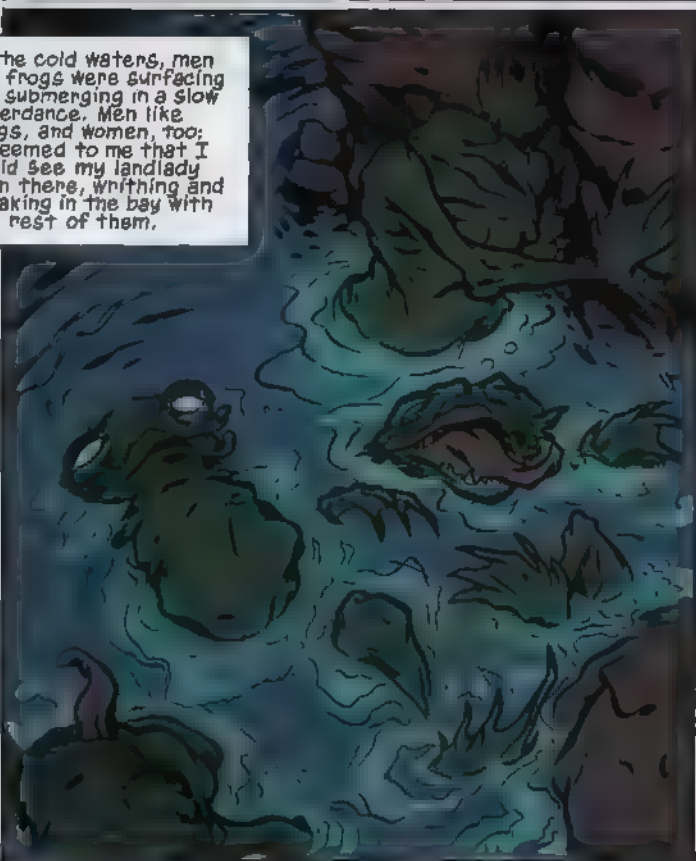


...but it
will do.

And my
eyes were
gett ng
sharper
with the
moon.



In the cold waters, men
like frogs were surfacing
and submerging in a slow
waterdance. Men like
frogs, and women, too;
it seemed to me that I
could see my landlady
down there, writhing and
croaking in the bay with
the rest of them.

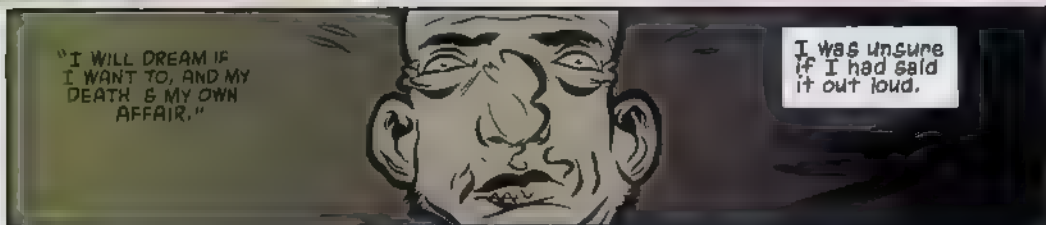


It was too soon for
another change-- I was
still exhausted from the
night before-- but I
felt strange under that
amber moon.





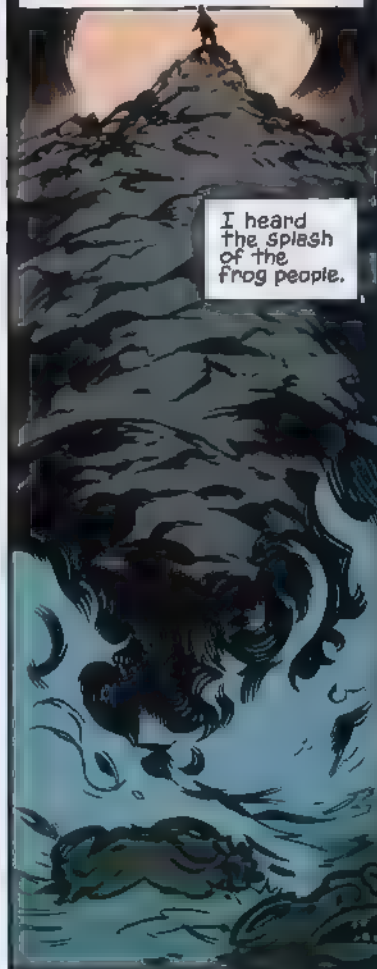
POOR WOLF-MAN,
ALL HIS DREAMS HAVE
COME TO THIS. A LOWLY
DEATH UPON
A DISTANT CLIFF



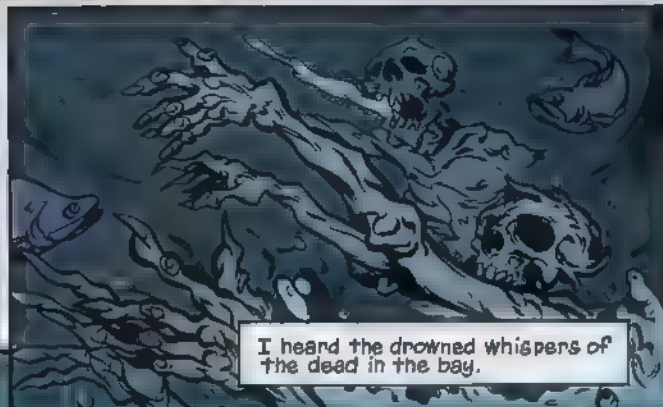
"I WILL DREAM IF
I WANT TO, AND MY
DEATH IS MY OWN
AFFAIR."

I was unsure
if I had said
it out loud.

Senses heighten in the moon's
light: I heard the roar of the
ocean still, but now, overlaid on
top of it, I could hear each
wave rise and crash.



I heard
the splash
of the
frog people.



I heard the drowned whispers of
the dead in the bay.



I heard the creak of the
green wrecks far beneath
the ocean.

Small improves, too.

The dwarf that
siding man was
human.

...while the fat
man had other
blood in him.

And the
figure in
the silks...

I had smelled her perfume when I wore a man's
shape. Now I could smell something else, less
heady, beneath it. A smell of decay, of putrefy-
ing meat and rotten flesh.

The silk
fluttered.
She was
moving
toward me.

She held the knife.

MADAME
EZEKIEL?

My voice was
roughening and
coarsening.
Soon, I would
lose it all. I
didn't under-
stand what was
happening...

But the moon was
rising higher and
higher, losing its
amber color and
filling my mind
with its pale light.

"MADAME
EZEKIEL?"

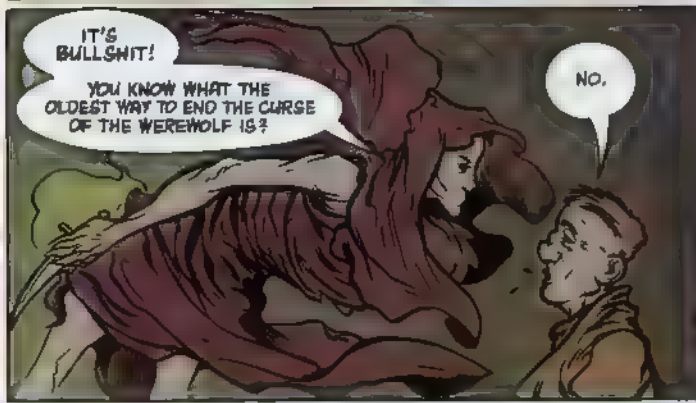


YOU DESERVE TO DIE. IF ONLY FOR WHAT YOU DID TO MY CARDS. THEY WERE OLD.



I DON'T DIE. *EVEN A MAN WHO IS PURE IN HEART, AND SAYS HIS PRAYERS BY NIGHT..."

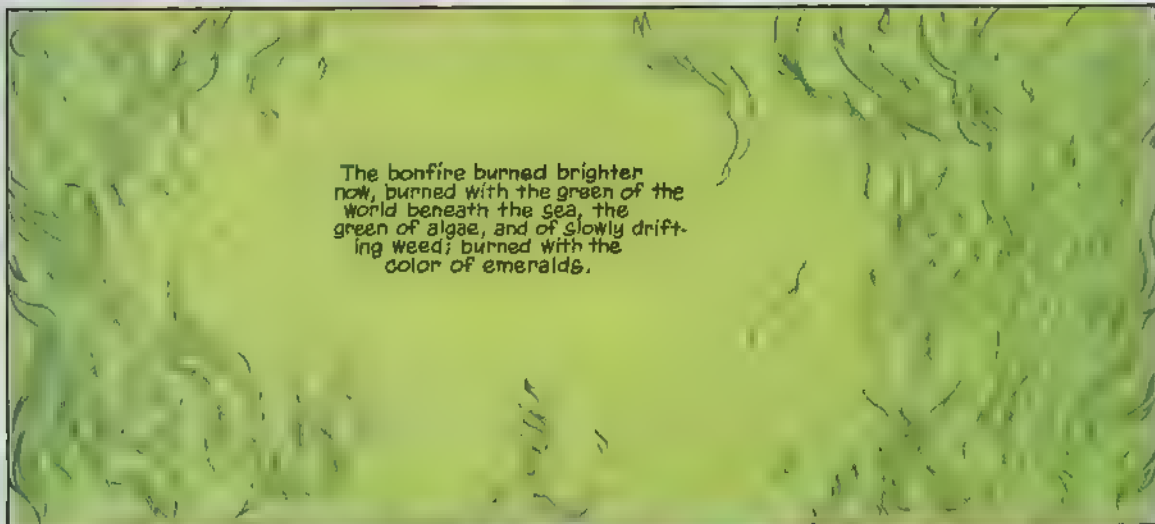
REMEMBER?



IT'S BULLSHIT!

YOU KNOW WHAT THE OLDEST WAY TO END THE CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF IS?

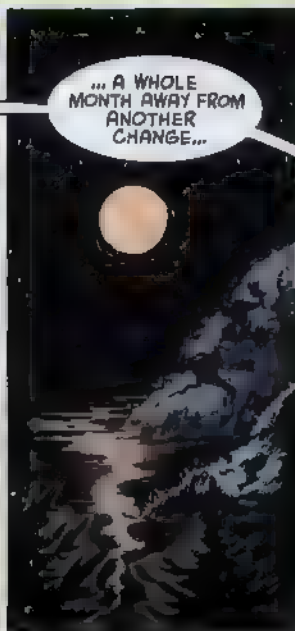
NO.



The bonfire burned brighter now, burned with the green of the world beneath the sea, the green of algae, and of slowly drifting weed; burned with the color of emeralds.



YOU SIMPLY WAIT 'TIL THEY'RE IN HUMAN SHAPE...



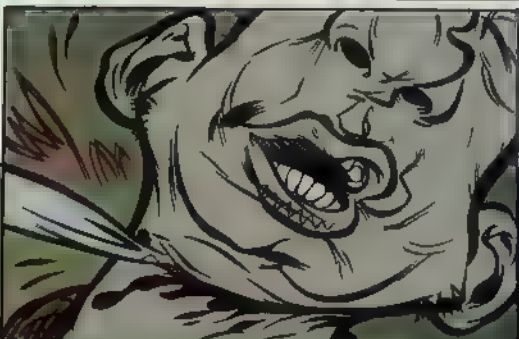
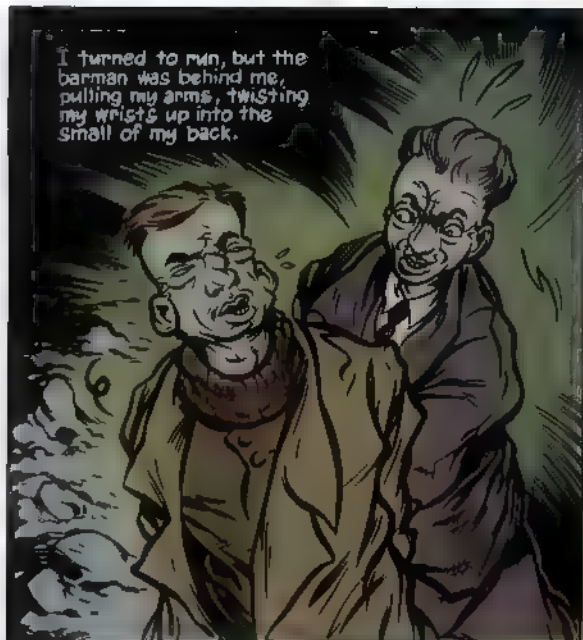
... A WHOLE MONTH AWAY FROM ANOTHER CHANGE...



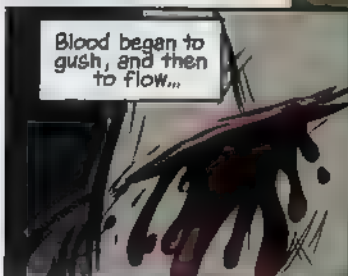
... THEN YOU TAKE THE SACRIFICIAL KNIFE, AND YOU KILL THEM.

THAT'S ALL.

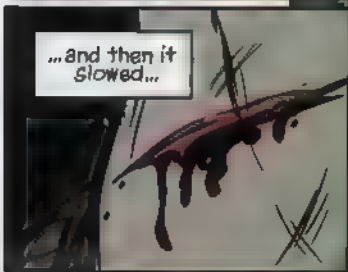
I turned to run, but the
barman was behind me,
pulling my arms, twisting
my wrists up into the
small of my back.



Blood began to
gush, and then
to flow...



...and then it
slowed...



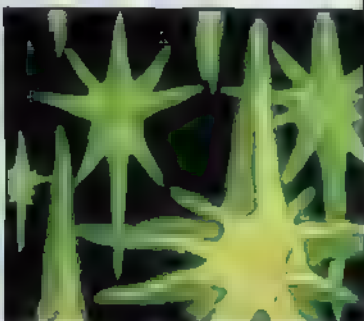
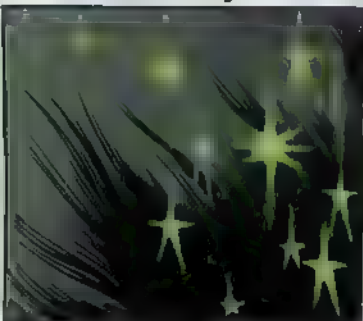
...and
stopped.

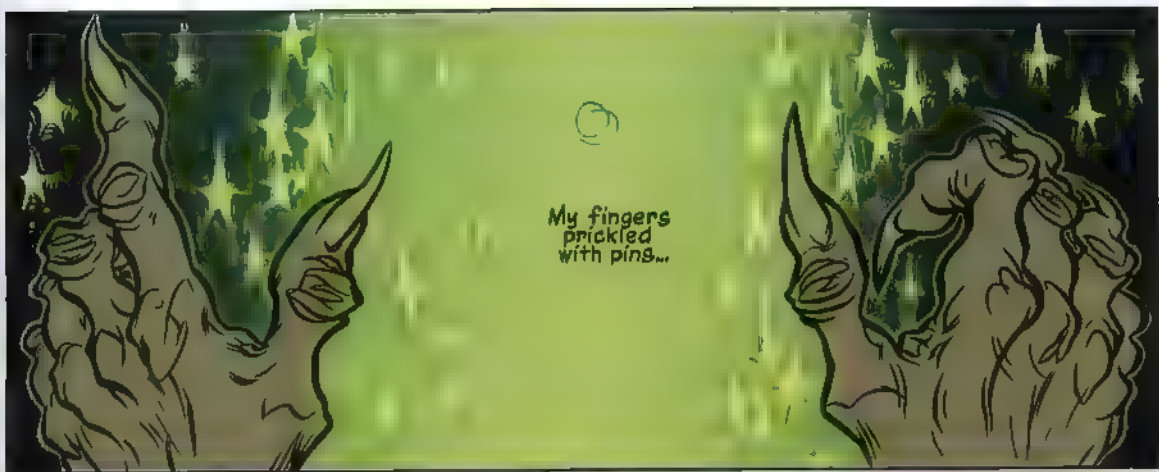


The pounding in the front of my head, the pressure in
the back. All a rolling change a how-wow-row-now
change a red wall coming towards me from the night,

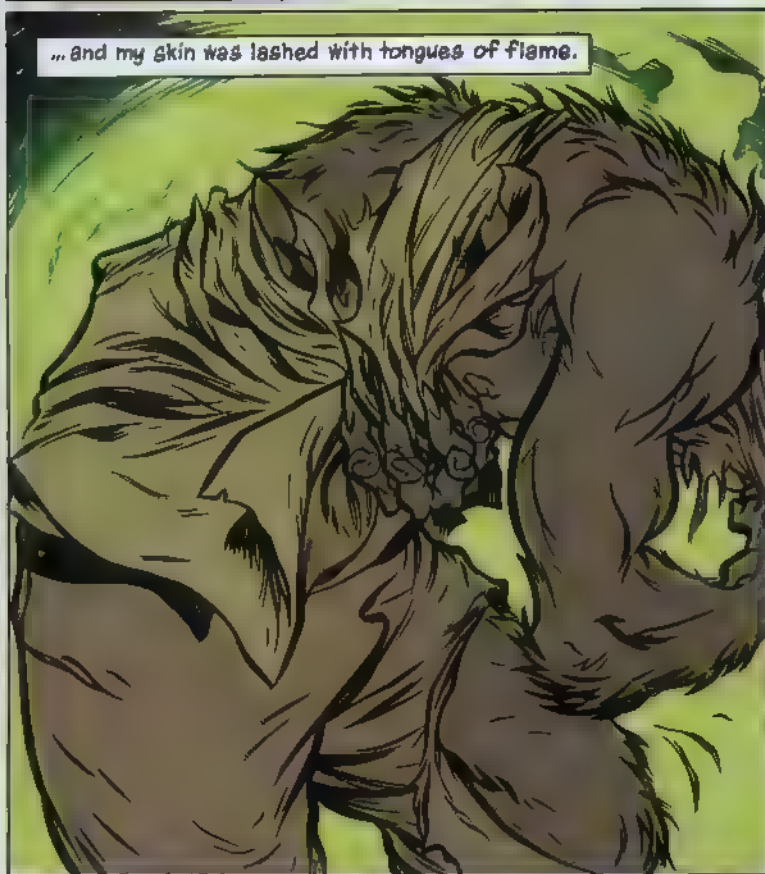


I tasted stars dissolved in brine, fizzy and distant and salt.





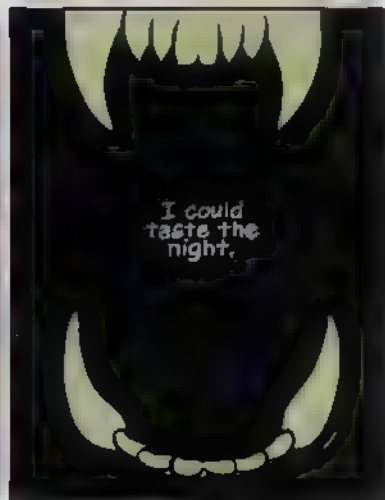
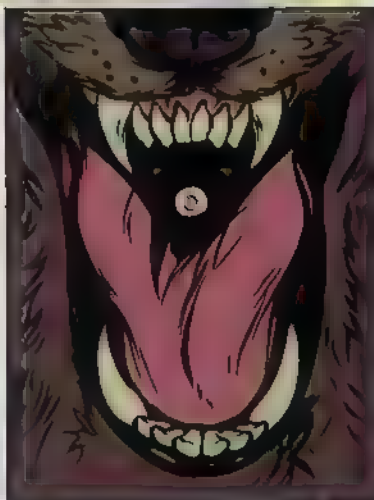
My fingers
prickled
with pins...



... and my skin was lashed with tongues of flame.



My eyes were topsy



I could
taste the
night,

My breath steamed and billowed in the icy air.

I growled,
involuntarily,
low in my
throat.

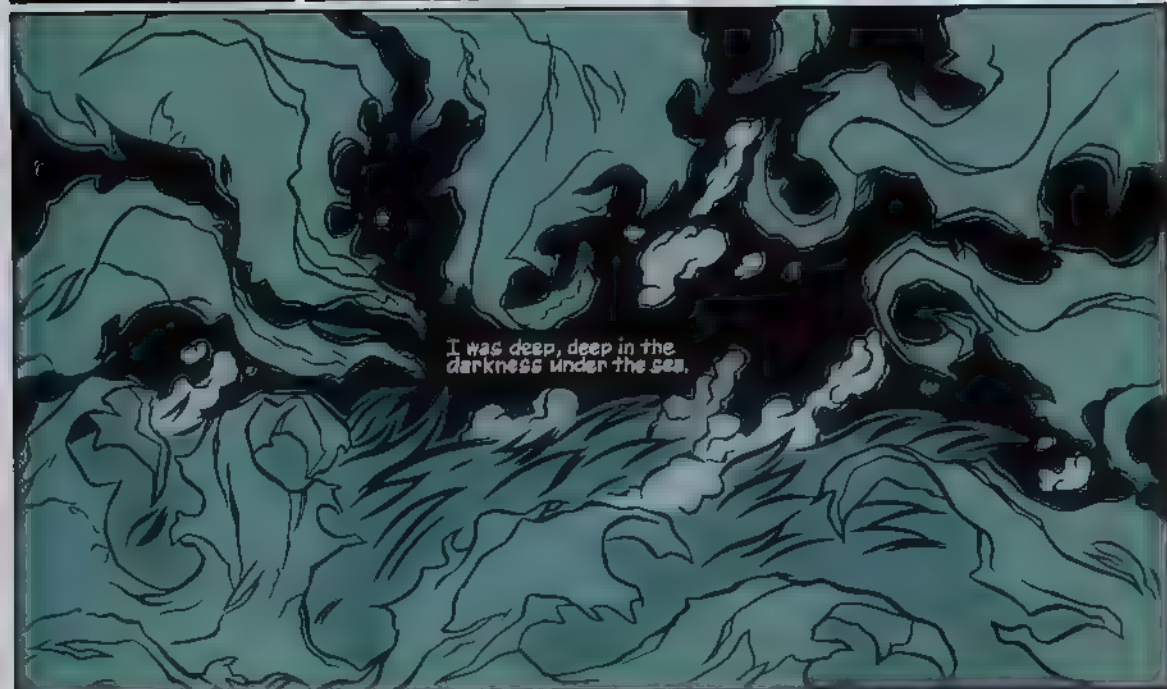
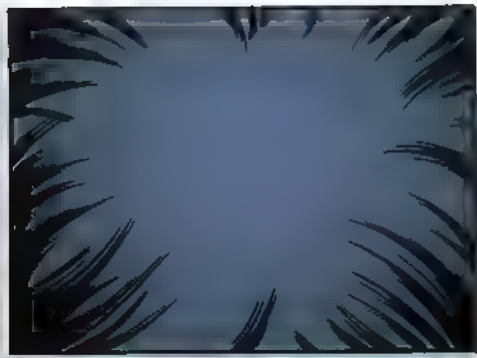
My forepaws
were touching
the snow.

I pulled back,
tensed,
and sprang at
her.

There was a sense of
corruption that hung in
the air, like a mist,
surrounding me.

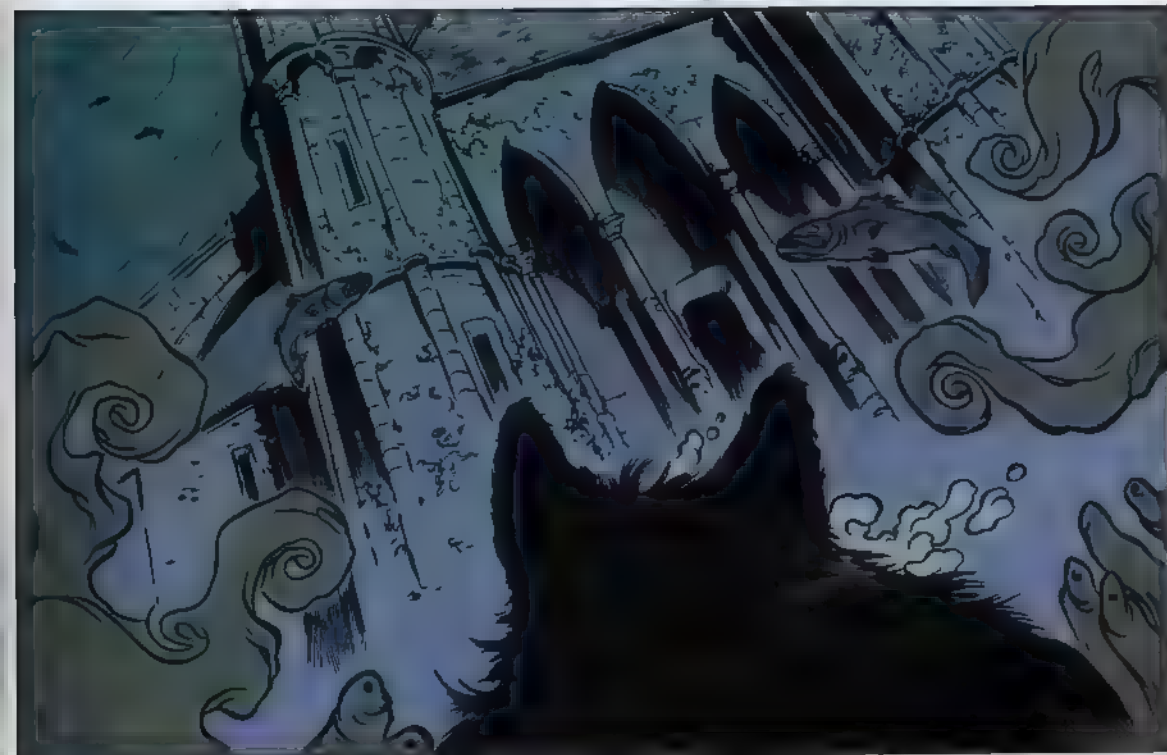
High in my leap,
I seemed to pause...

...and something
burst like a
soapbubble.



I was deep, deep in the
darkness under the sea.

I was standing on all fours on a slimy rock floor, at the entrance of some
kind of citadel, built of enormous, rough-hewn stones.



The stones gave off a pale, glow-in-the-dark light; a ghostly luminescence, like the hands of a watch.


A cloud of black blood trickled from my neck.

She was standing in the doorway in front of me. She was now six, maybe seven feet high. There was flesh on her skeletal bones, pitted and gnawed...

...but the gilks were weeds, drifting in the cold water, down there in the dreamless deeps.

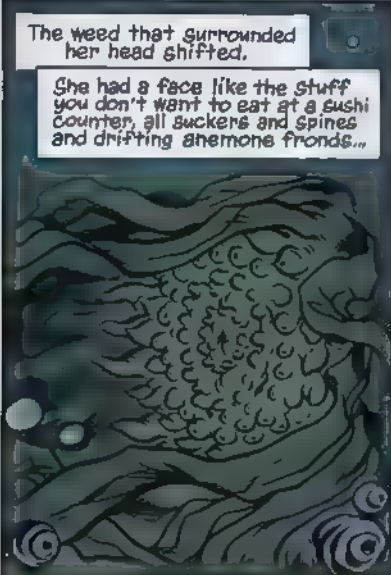
They hid her face like a slow, green veil.

There were limpets growing on the upper surfaces of her arms, and on the flesh that hung from her ribcage.




I felt like I was being crushed. I couldn't think anymore.

She moved towards me.

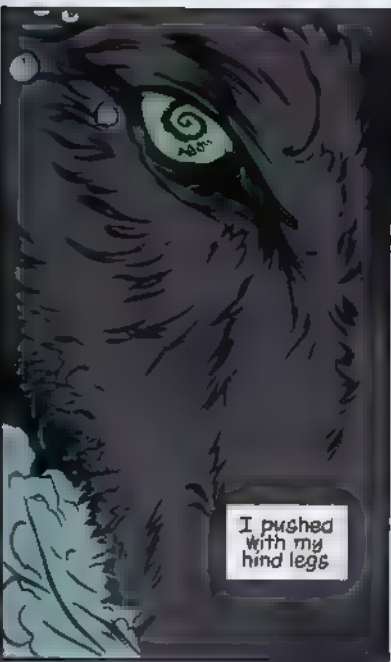


The weed that surrounded her head shifted.

She had a face like the stuff you don't want to eat at a sushi counter, all suckers and spines and drifting anemone fronds...



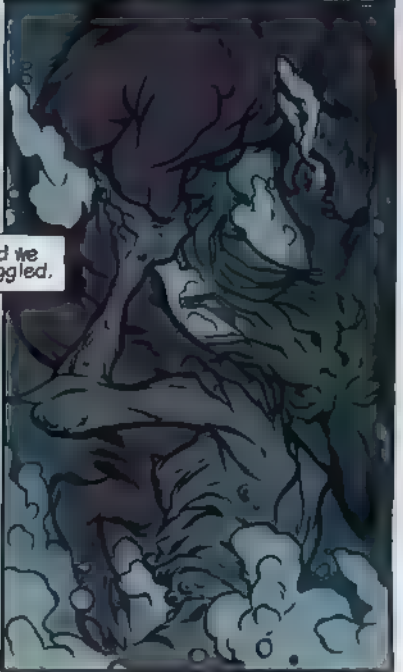
... and somewhere in all that, I knew she was smiling.



I pushed with my hind legs



We met there, in the deep.



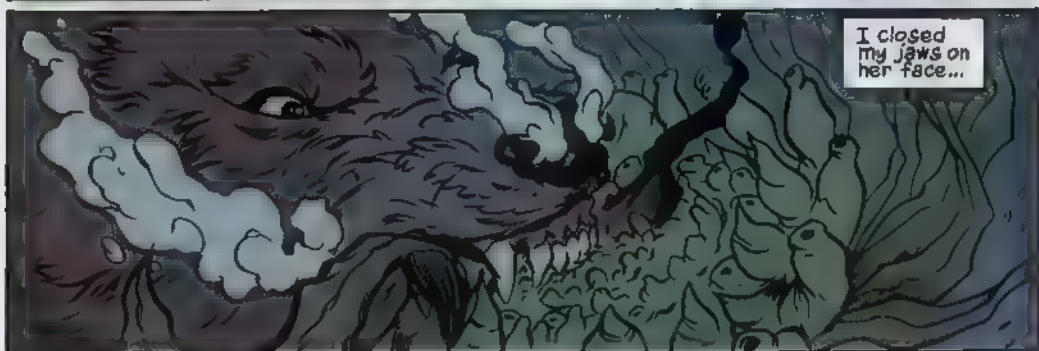
... and we struggled.



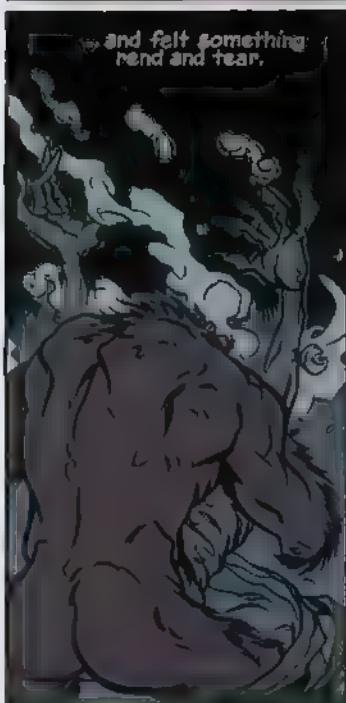
It was
so cold...



...so
dark.



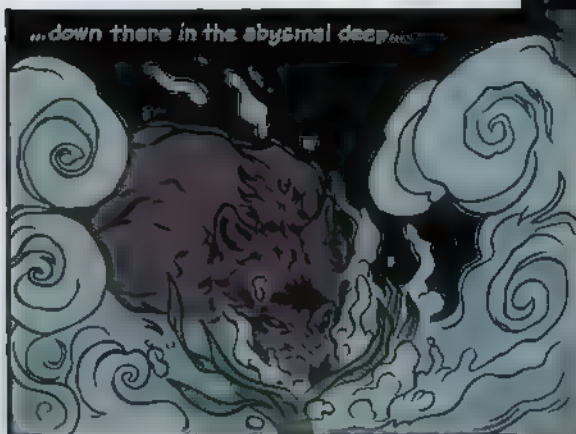
I closed
my jaws on
her face...



and felt something
rend and tear.

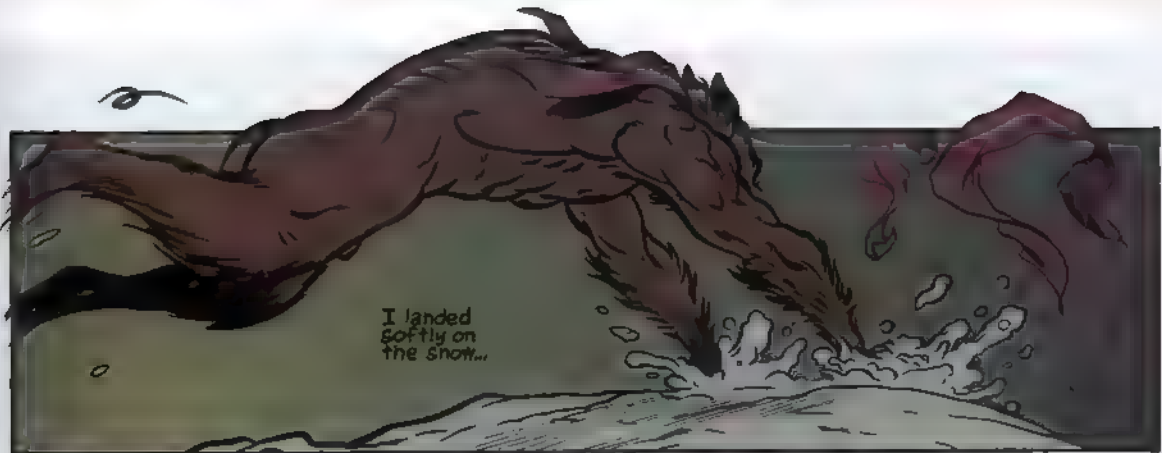


It was almost a kiss...



...down there in the abysmal deep...

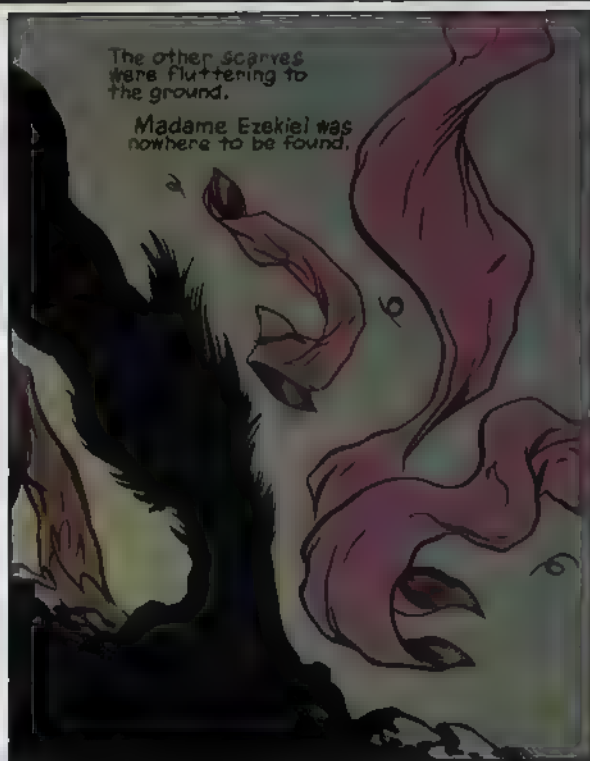




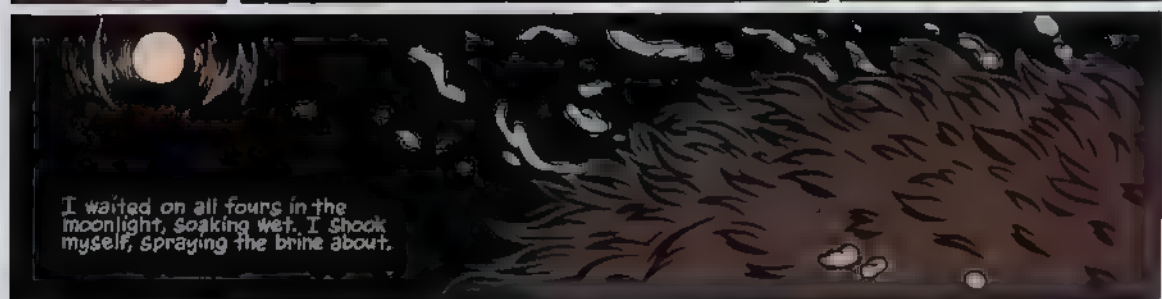
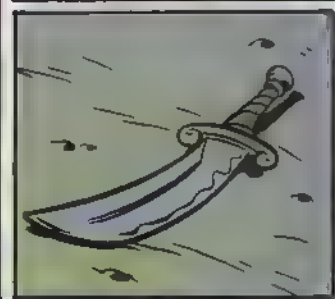
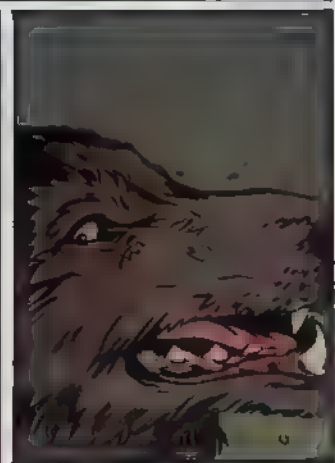
I landed
softly on
the snow...



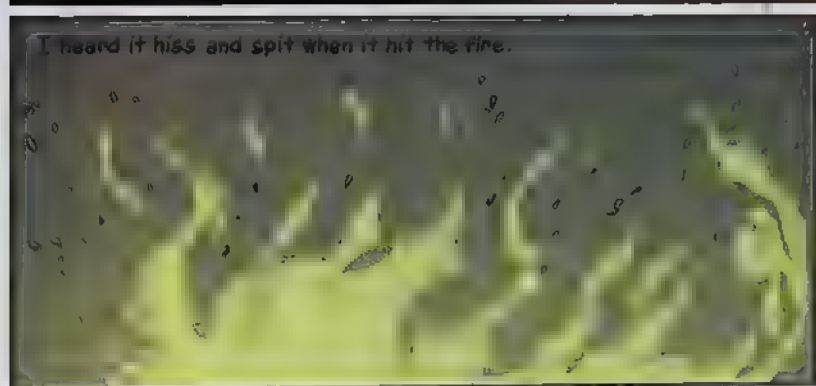
a silk scarf
lodged between
my jaws.



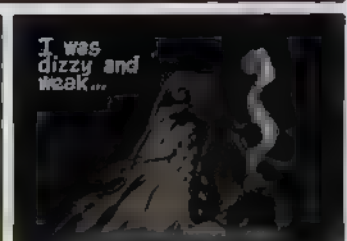
The other scarves
were fluttering to
the ground.
Madame Ezekiel was
nowhere to be found.



I waited on all fours in the
moonlight, soaking wet. I shook
myself, spraying the brine about.

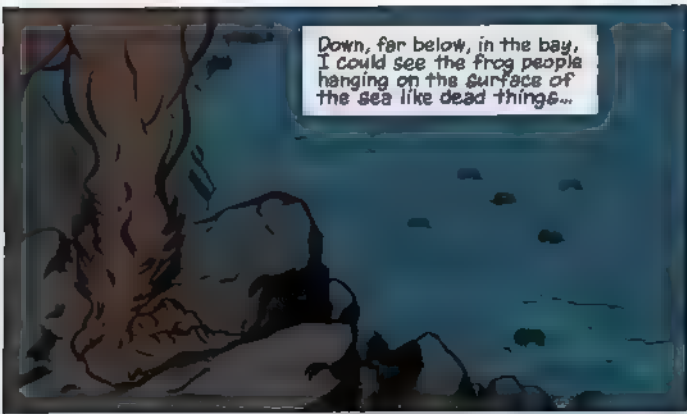


I heard it hiss and spit when it hit the fire.

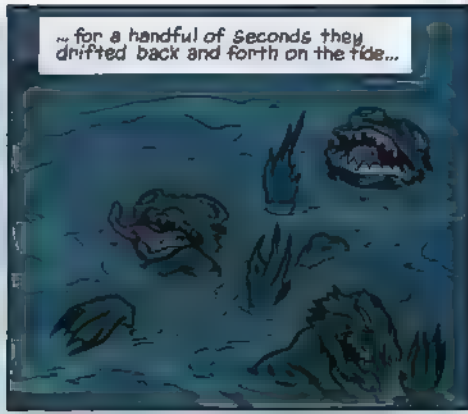


I was
dizzy and
weak...


... I pulled the air
into my lungs.



Down, far below, in the bay,
I could see the frog people
hanging on the surface of
the sea like dead things...




... for a handful of seconds they
drifted back and forth on the tide...




... then they twisted and leapt, and
each by each they plop-plopped down
into the bay and vanished beneath
the sea.



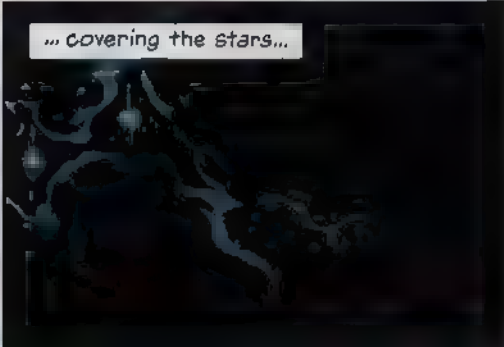
There was
a scream



It was the bartender, the pop-
eyed aluminum-sided Salesman.
He was staring at the night sky...



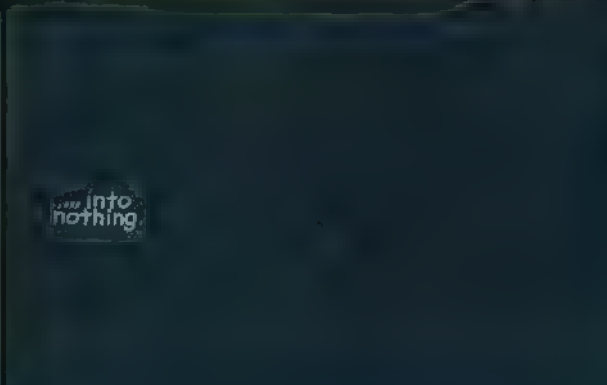
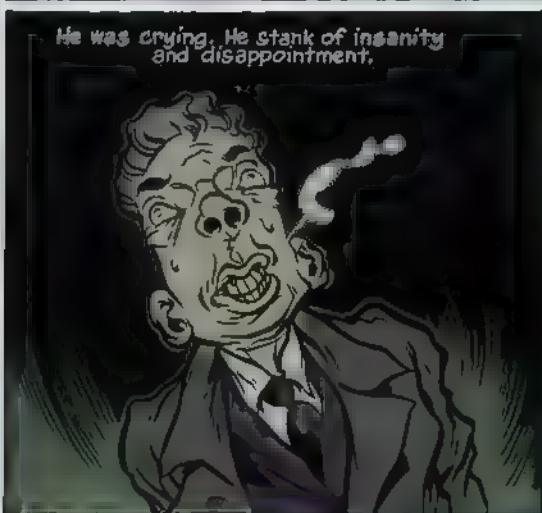
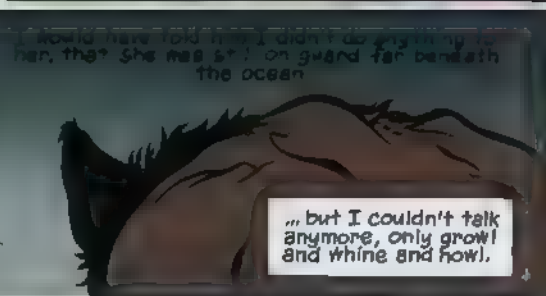
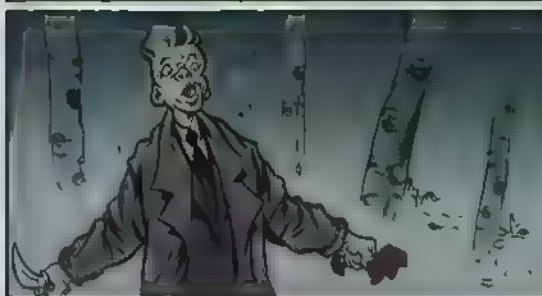
... the clouds
that were
drifting in...



... covering the stars...



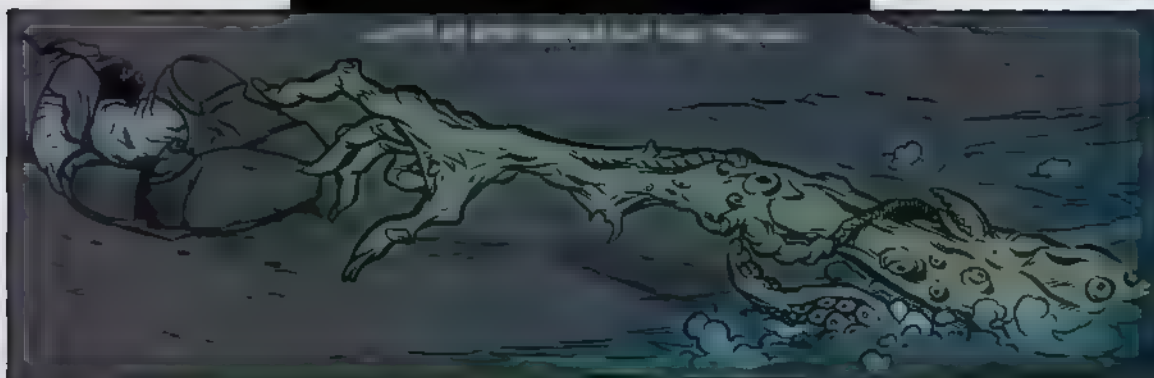
...and he was screaming.



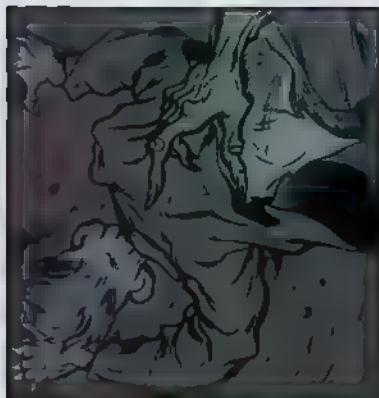
...and he was

In the moonlight, blood is black, not red, and the marks he left on the cliffside as he fell and bounced and fell were smudges of black and grey.

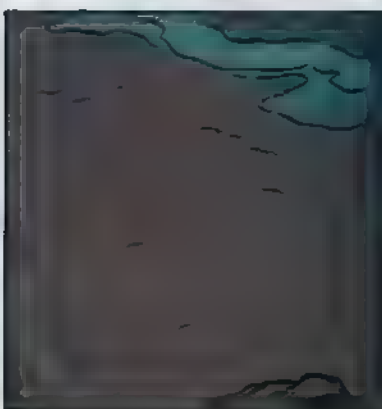
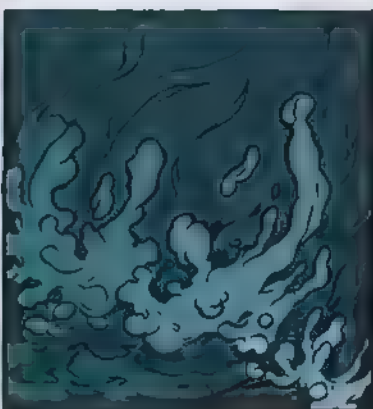
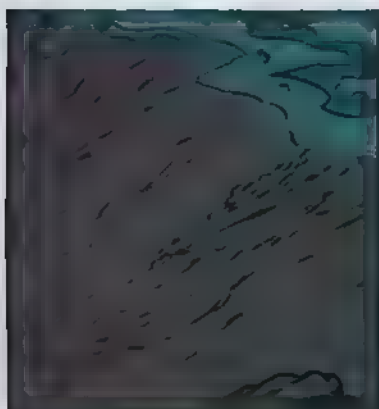
...and, then, he lay still on the icy rocks at the base of the cliff.



... and dragged him, with a slowness that was almost painful to watch...



... under the dark water.





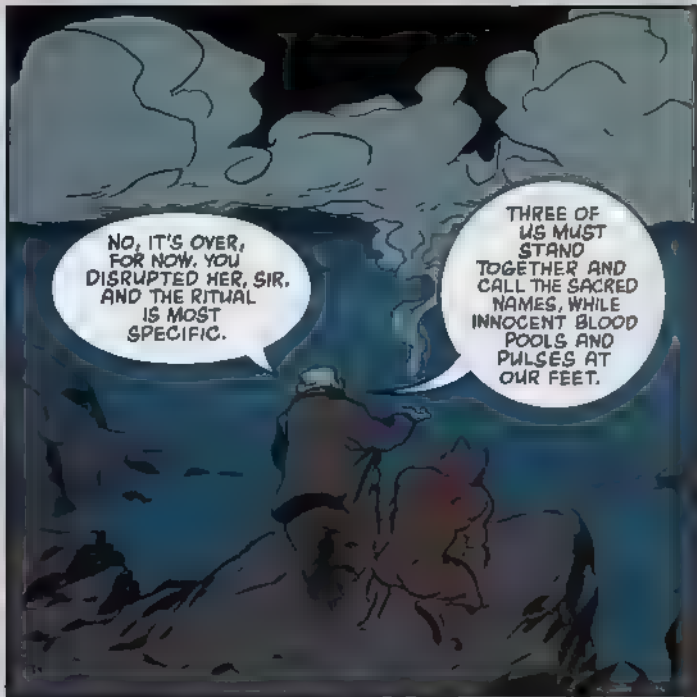
A hand scratched
the back of my head.
It felt good.

WHAT WAS SHE? JUST AN AVATAR OF THE
DEEP ONES, SIR. AN EIDOLON, A MANI-
FESTATION, IF YOU WILL, SENT UP TO
US FROM THE UTMOST DEEPS TO BRING
ABOUT THE END OF THIS WORLD.

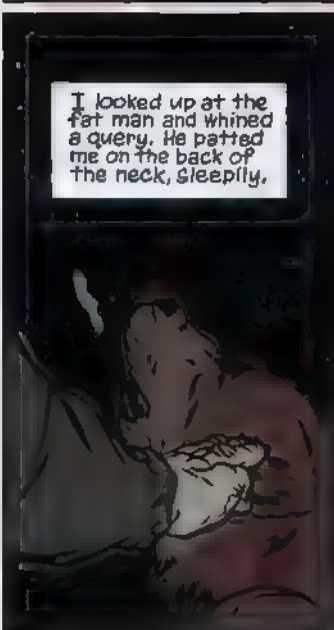


NO, IT'S OVER,
FOR NOW. YOU
DISRUPTED HER, SIR.
AND THE RITUAL
IS MOST
SPECIFIC.

THREE OF
US MUST
STAND
TOGETHER AND
CALL THE SACRED
NAMES, WHILE
INNOCENT BLOOD
POOLS AND
PULSES AT
OUR FEET.



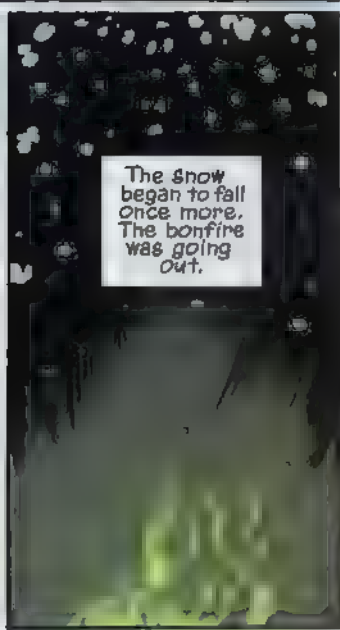
I looked up at the
fat man and whined
a query. He patted
me on the back of
the neck, sleepily.



OF COURSE SHE DOESN'T
LOVE YOU, BOY. SHE HARDLY EVEN
EXISTS ON THIS PLANE, IN ANY
MATERIAL SENSE.



The snow
began to fall
once more.
The bonfire
was going
out.



YOUR CHANGE
TONIGHT, INCIDENTALLY,
I WOULD OPINE, IS A DIRECT
RESULT OF THE SELF-SAME
CELESTIAL CONFIGURATIONS
AND LUNAR FORCES THAT
MADE TONIGHT SUCH A PERFECT
NIGHT TO BRING BACK MY
OLD FRIENDS FROM
UNDERNEATH...

He continued talking in
his deep voice, and
perhaps he was telling
me important things...

I'll never know...

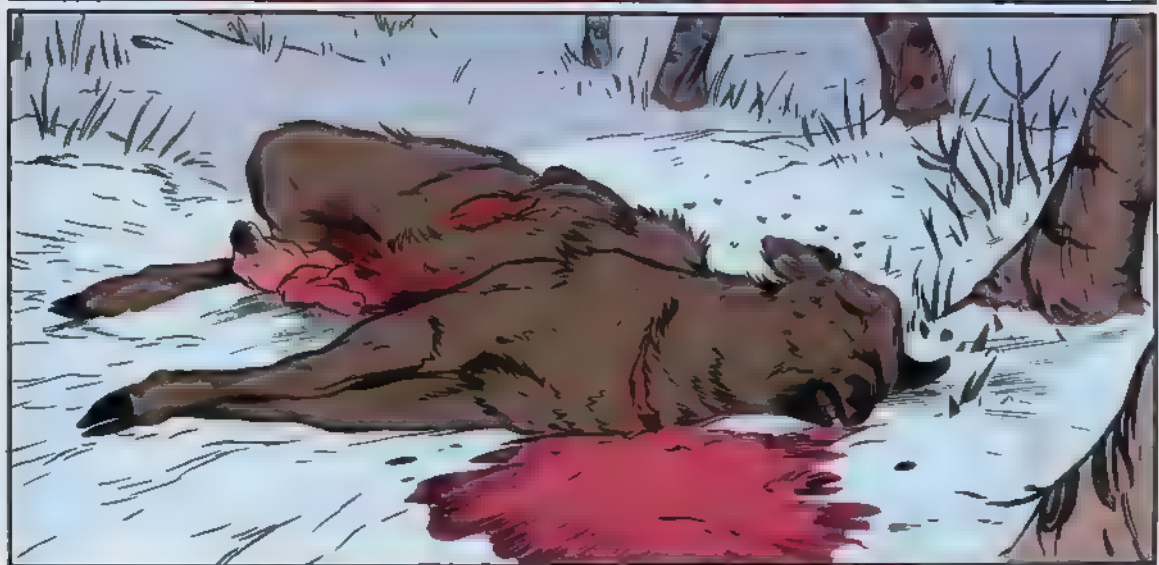
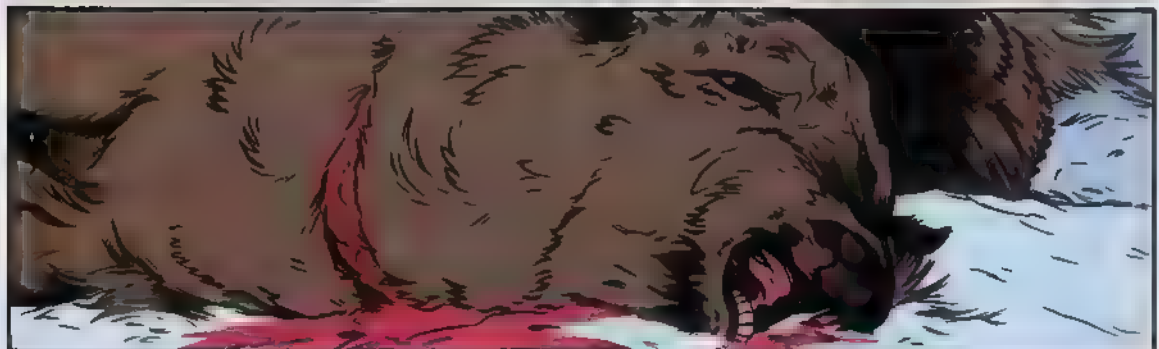
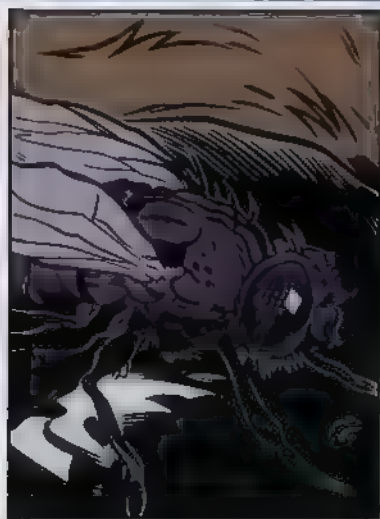
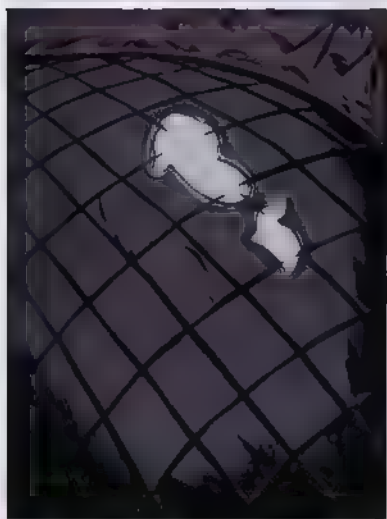
...for the appe-
tite was growing
inside me...

...and his
words had
lost all
but the
shadow of
their
meaning.

I had no further interest in the sea or the clifftop or the fat man. There were deer running in the woods beyond the meadow: I could smell them on the winter night's air.

And I was
above all
things...

... hungry.



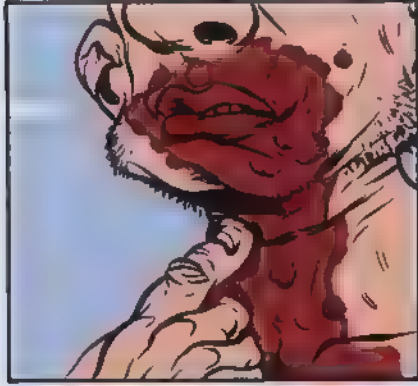


I was naked when I came to myself again, early the next morning. The snow was stained a fluorescent crimson where the deer's belly had been torn out.

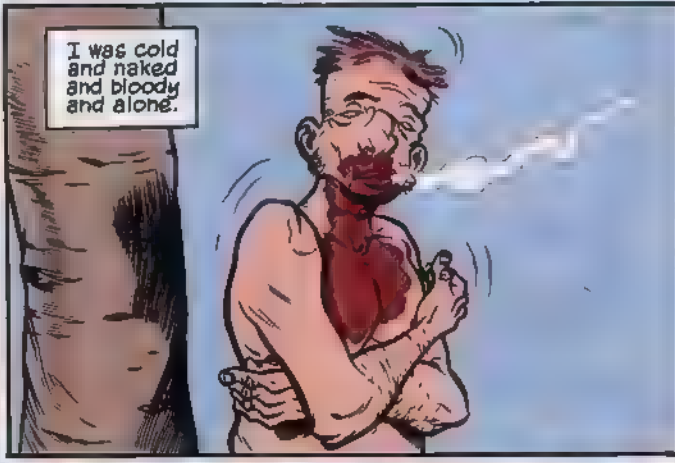
My face and chest were sticky and red with its blood.



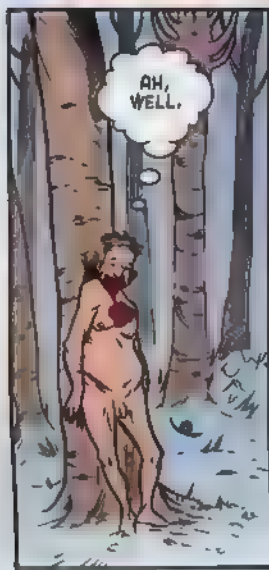
My throat was scabbed and scarred, and it stung; by the next full moon, it would be whole once more.



I was cold and naked and bloody and alone.



AH, WELL.



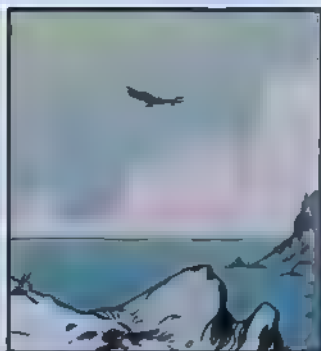
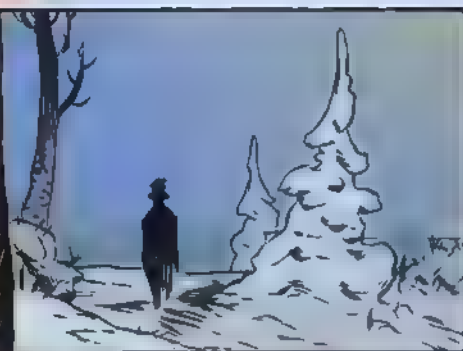
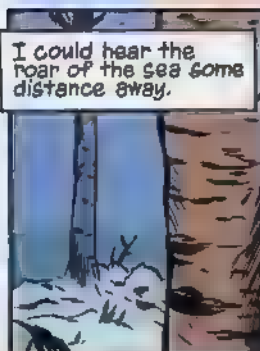
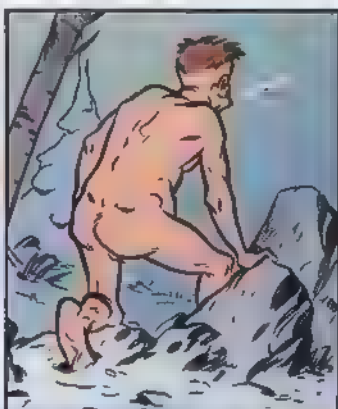
IT HAPPENS TO ALL OF US.



I JUST GET IT ONCE A MONTH.



I was painfully exhausted, but I would hold out until I found a deserted barn, or a cave, and then I was going to sleep for a couple of weeks.

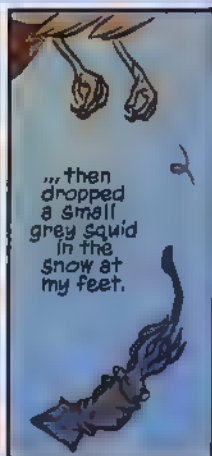




A hawk flew low
over the snow
with something
dangling from
its talons.



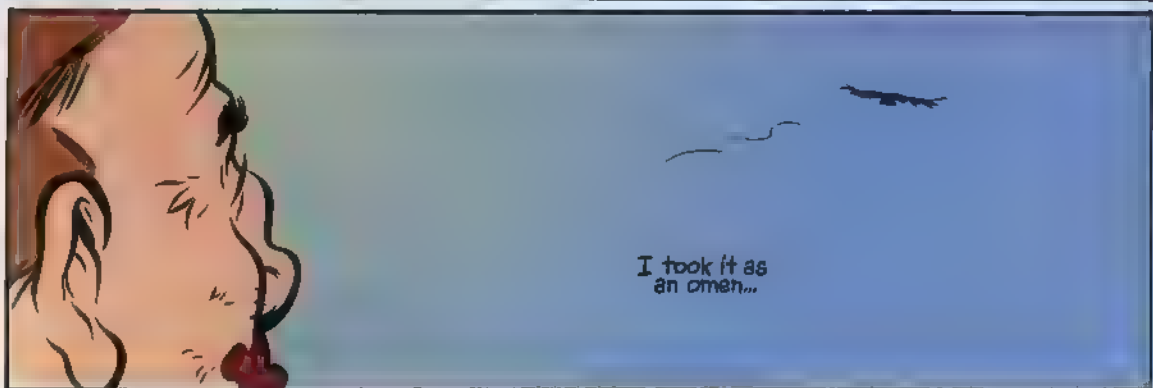
It hovered
above me
for a
heartbeat...



...then
dropped
a small
grey squid
in the
snow at
my feet.



The flaccid thing lay there, still and silent and
tentacled in the snow.



I took it as
an omen...

... but whether it was a
good omen or a bad omen,
I couldn't say.

I really didn't care anymore; I turned my back to the sea...

... and on the
shadowy town
of Innsmouth...

... and began to
make my way
toward the
city.



THE
END

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